

# THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN GREECE



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THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN  
*GREECE*

*by*

*Geoffrey Trease*



WITH A MAP, 26 PHOTOGRAPHS,  
AND FRONTISPIECE



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## CONTENTS

*List of Illustrations, 6-7*

*Pictorial Map, 8-9*

*Author's Note, 10*

I. Nausicaa's Island	11
II. Bird's Eye View	26
III. The Wine-dark Seas	37
IV. Through the Corinth Cana	48
V. City of the Violet Crown	59
VI. The Home of the Goddess	73
VII. 'Happy Easter!'	82
VIII. Summer Comes to the City	101
IX. Up in the Mountains	118
X. A Train to Salonika	130
XI. Beyond the Isthmus	138
XII. The Isles of Greece	147

*Index and Pronunciations, 155*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

The Byzantine churches were quite different from any others they had seen	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<i>Facing</i>
Coffu street-scene	16
The Corinth Canal	17
The Acropolis	32
The Erechtheum	32
Constitution Square	33
Greek cafés were for men. . . .	33
A corner of the Plaka, old 'Turkish part of Athens	48
The church at Daphni	49
The Evzones looked very dashing	49
Easter ceremonies	64
Delphi, once 'a citadel of shining temples'	65
'We have lots of storks' nests'	65
'Olympus itself, where Zeus and Hera had once sat'	80
The famous Vale of Tempe	80

	<b><i>Facing</i></b>
Peasant-women cutting the corn and . . .	81
. . . carrying it home on a donkey	81
The theatre at Epidaurus	96
The original site of the Olympic Games	96
Olympia lay in a flat, well-wooded, luxuriant plain	97
The end of the farmer's day	112
The ancient palace of King Minos at Cnossus	113
The King's Throne	113
Potters in the Dodecanese Islands	128
Rhodes: Street of the Knights	128
One of the stone lions which guard the sanctuary of Apollo	129



The thick black line shows



the route taken by the travellers

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

All characters in this story are entirely imaginary, which I emphasize because I have mentioned real ships and schools (except Byron College, which is fictitious) and there really is a British ex-servicemen's association with an adopted school and village at Salonika. I am indebted to Mr G. P. Dacoglou, of the Oceanways Steamship Agency in London, for checking the passages which refer to the voyage of the Typaldos vessel, *Angelica*, and to the Anglo-American Schools in Athens for further information and the sight of their amusing magazine, *Evzone*, to refresh my own pleasant memories of visiting them and other Athenian schools.

No two books agree on the consistent spelling of Greek names. Should one write 'Humettos' (ancient Greek), 'Hymettus' (Latin, but familiar to English eyes), or 'Imettos' (modern Greek)? As a rule, I have given well-known names in their familiar form (Socrates not Sokrates) and others, such as Elliniko and Lake Daoukli, in more modern guise.

G.T.



## CHAPTER I

### NAUSICAA'S ISLAND

GREECE—at last!

Nicola pattered across the deck, still wet from its recent swilling, and put her elbows on the rail. The fresh wind of morning flicked her hair into her eyes and she was glad she had waited just long enough to grope for her sweater amid the dimly-lit confusion of the cabin. How could Mummy and those other women go on sleeping in their bunks at a moment like this?

It was still March. The new day, stealing greyly over the mountains, split the wall of darkness into sea and land and sky, revealing peaks and ranges thickly dappled with snow.

Nicola was alone on the deck, except for a sailor coiling up a hose-pipe in the distance. It would have been all the same if the rail had been lined with chattering passengers. She was lost in a dream of her own—the dream which had been with her ever since she was little, when her father had first told her stories about the Greek gods and goddesses, about Athens and Sparta, the Trojan Horse and the monster in the maze.

Some day, somehow, she had vowed she would see this enchanted country for herself. School—instead of putting her off—had only strengthened her determination. And a few months ago, when her father's university had granted him a term's leave of absence to do some research in Greece, Nicola's resolve had hardened into the toughest steel. *She* was not going to become a boarder or go and live with Uncle Dick and Auntie Jean. *She* was going to Greece with her parents. She would do any amount of lessons while she was there, but she was *not* going to be left behind. Mummy and Daddy had given in quite easily. Perhaps, she reflected afterwards, they had not been all that anxious themselves to go off and leave her for the best part of six months?

Yesterday, when they had come aboard the *Angelica* at the Italian port of Brindisi, her dream had seemed very, very near fulfilment. The Greek sailors, the pale blue-and-white flag with its broad stripes and its cross in one corner, the strange, beautiful Greek characters on the various ship's notices—letters she had

never seen before outside a printed book—all these had combined to make her feel that she was already almost there. But the first sight of land was something special. She had turned in, knowing that the ship was due at Corfu at seven o'clock in the morning, and she had made up her mind to be on deck well before then.

All night the *Angelica* had pursued her steady, slantwise course across the Strait of Otranto, the wide bottle-neck which connects the Adriatic with the Ionian Sea, and during those dark hours Nicola had slept fitfully, waking at intervals to peer blearily at the luminous hands of her wrist-watch. At a quarter to six she had felt she could wait no longer. She had swung down from her upper bunk, pulled on her clothes, and slipped from the cabin.

Land! Yes, the land was there, sure enough. No 'faint smudge on the horizon', as it usually was in stories, but land in great wall-like towering masses, looming out of the water. Were there shepherds up there, she wondered, stirring by their camp-fires and looking down upon the ship? From that height even the three-thousand-ton *Angelica*, so proud and graceful with her tall slender funnel and her twin masts, must look like a little boy's model floating in the bath.

Her brown eyes searched the mountain-sides, still indistinct in the half-light of early morning. So this was Corfu—the island which came into the *Odyssey* as the Land of the Phaeacians! It was her favourite bit in Homer. Through these very waters poor Odysseus had struggled to safety after the shipwreck. No wonder he had found it difficult to land—the coast looked very rocky. Here, naked and exhausted, he had crawled into some bushes and fallen asleep, to be startled the next morning by the shouts of the Princess Nausicaa and her friends as they played 'catch' with a ball on the sea-shore nearby. Nicola had always admired Nausicaa's poise and dignity in dealing with the situation.

She had stood her ground when the other girls fled screaming at the sight of the rough castaway. She had called them back and made them set out the remains of their picnic for him, and dry clothes to put on. Then, instead of rushing home with this romantic stranger and perhaps embarrassing her parents, she had gone ahead to explain everything, leaving him with sensible directions for finding the palace.

Even as a little girl, Nicola had always preferred the Palace of Alcinous to any other palace in her fairy-tales. She knew it so well, she could see it with her eyes shut. *'Brazen were the walls which from the threshold to the inmost chamber ran this way and that, and round them a frieze of blue. Golden were the doors which enclosed the well-built house, and silver door-posts stood upon the brazen threshold. Silver was the lintel above them, and of gold the hook of the door.'* Just as real to her was the garden with its twin fountains, its apple-trees and fig-trees, its pears and pomegranates. 'Pears and pomegranates . . .'—there was something especially luscious in those words.

Suddenly Nicola was recalled from (very roughly) the tenth century B.C. to (very definitely) the twentieth century A.D.

A boy was leaning over the rail quite close to her.

She had seen him from a distance the night before, both at dinner in the saloon and walking the deck with his father. He was English and looked about her own age, probably 15, certainly not more. She now observed that he badly needed a hair-cut and that he had a gaping rift in the heel of his left sock; that his nose was really rather nice, but his ears were regrettable in their extent and in the angle at which they were attached to his head; and that there was rather a lost look in his eyes, though, to judge from his wiry appearance, she guessed that he was quite tough and could probably look after himself. Apart from these details, being a well-mannered girl taught not to stare, Nicola was practically unconscious of his existence.

It was only a few moments before he broke the silence between them.

'Hullo', he said shyly. 'Should be getting in, soon.'

Nicola smiled. She was ready for conversation, ready to wake up from her private dream and quite eager to share her enthusiasm with someone else.

'Yes', she said. 'Doesn't Corfu look wonderful?'

'That isn't Corfu—that's the mainland. Epirus.'

'What?'

'Corfu's to port.' The boy turned, lounging with his back to the rail, and pointed across the deck. For the first time she realized that there was land that side as well.

'Are you sure?' she faltered. It was rather a jolt to find that all her soulful meditations on Homer had been lavished on the wrong coastline!

'Course I'm sure', said the boy with an easy grin. 'It's obvious if you've looked at the chart. We come northwards between the island and the mainland. That puts Epirus to starboard and Corfu to port—port is left and starboard is right', he added kindly, with a boy's superiority.

'I knew that,' she retorted.

'Well—' he indicated the sky which was now reddening above the snowy ridges of the mainland, 'you weren't expecting the sun to rise in the west—or were you?'

Nicola bit her lip. She decided to laugh it off. 'I am a fool', she admitted good-humouredly. She crossed the deck and he followed her to the port rail. The mountains were much closer to the water on this side. The main summit in front (she learnt from the guide-book later) was Pantocrator, just 3,000 feet high, or a little lower than the highest peaks in the Lake District at home, but gaining dignity because it rose straight from sea-level. 'I wonder', she said, 'just where it was he came ashore and met her.'

'Met her? Who?'

'Nausicaa.'

'Who's she when she's at home?'

Nicola swung round and looked at him with blank amazement on her freckled face.

'Haven't you heard of Nausicaa? Don't you realize Corfu was the island where Odysseus—' She paused. His puzzled expression was all the answer she needed. 'I say, your education *has* been neglected', she added.

She meant the words jokingly. She was alarmed to see him redden.

'I don't set up to be brainy', he said stiffly.

There was an awkward silence. They both stared fixedly across a sweep of bay that twinkled pink and grey in the sunrise, at the clustered white houses of the port they were making for. Every moment, as the daylight strengthened, fresh details appeared. Sandy beaches, dense woods billowing steeply down to creeks and inlets, cottages peeping out from silvery-grey olive-trees, cypresses

pointed heavenwards like black spears, white churches perched on hilltops and ledges, gaily-painted fishing-boats, . . . Nicola caught her breath at the beauty of it all. This was the Greece she had dreamed of.

'Are you going ashore?' she asked. 'I think we stop here for three or four hours. We're going with a party--'

'Yes, I heard them arranging it last night. But my father doesn't like parties--that is', he went on, colouring again slightly, 'he'd sooner we knocked round on our own. You see he's a journalist. It's what he's used to.'

'Of course. Are you on a holiday?'

'In one way. I mean, Dad had some days due to him, so I persuaded him to come this slow way--normally he'd have flown. There's a non-stop plane you can get from London to Athens. His agency are moving him to Athens for a bit.'

'How exciting! What a wonderful place to work in! Isn't he thrilled?'

'Oh, I don't know. It's just a job with him, you know. He was sorry to leave Lisbon. He'd made friends there.'

'But--Athens!' Nicola opened her eyes wider. 'Are you all going to live there?'

'All? There's only me.' Again there was a brief, faintly awkward pause. 'Yes, Dad's going to try having me with him, and we'll see how it works out. He thinks I've been shifted round too much from one school to another and this aunt to that: int.'

'I *do* think he's right', said Nicola earnestly, speaking rather faster than usual because she had a sensation of skating on very thin ice. Was the boy's mother dead or divorced or what? Obviously the poor lamb was terribly touchy about something. It was safest, in the circumstances, to talk about her elf. 'My people are only going to Athens for a few months--Daddy's got one term's leave from College--but I jolly well made them bring me. Much better to stick together. Even my school came round in the end, specially when they realized there were some in Greece I could go to and be taught in English, just as I would be at home. Are you going to school while you're there?'

'I--I don't know. I don't suppose so. We haven't thought about it.'

'I thought we might be going to the same one', she explained. 'By our College is co-ed. That's where I'm going. It's jolly decent of them to take me just for one term.'

'Yes . . .' he agreed politely.

They went on chatting while the ship wheeled majestically into a spacious bay, now turning from oyster-grey to a slowly deepening blue as the sun climbed and the world took on its morning colours. The boy's name was Martin Murry. He was a queer mixture of shyness and sociability, ignorance and knowledge. Ships seemed to be among the things he knew most about. He was more interested in the *Angelica* herself than in the new country he was bound for.

'I can see my mother beckoning', said Nicola. 'I think they're serving breakfast early so that we can get ashore.'

'See you later then. I want to see them anchor.'

They parted at the entrance to the saloon. 'I was so thrilled when I saw *that* last night', Nicola laughed, pointing to the sign in Greek characters:

### Σ Α Λ Ο Ν Ι

As he looked puzzled, she added: 'I'd never seen Greek, outside a book. It made it seem so much more real, somehow.'

'Can you read it?'

'Of course! It's ever so easy, really. The first letter's an S, and the next but one is L. All the others in that word are the same as English.'

'S-a-l-o-n-i', he spelt out the word. 'Still, I'm glad they give the notices in other languages too. I'd never get the hang of this Greek stuff.'

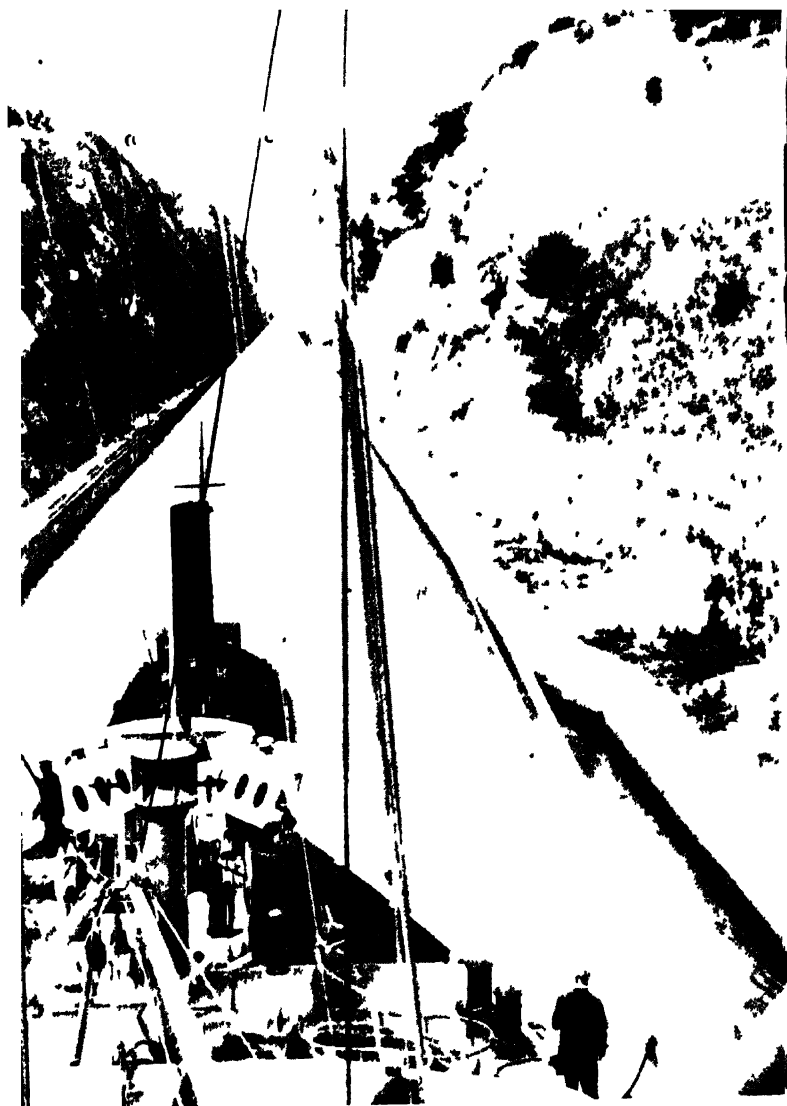
'But you would! You *must*', she urged. 'It's only in ships and trains and things that you can expect to have the notices in other languages. You'll get yourself into all sorts of difficulties if you can't tell "*Exit*" from "*Entrance*", or—'

'I'll get by', he interrupted with that odd note of defiance which sometimes came into his voice.

'Oh, dear, there's my father waving madly, I *must* go and have my breakfast. 'Bye for now.' She turned and hurried into the dining-saloon, where her parents had begun their meal.



*Confu street scene. Notice the houses, said Mr Wharton, how tall they are!*



*The Corinth Canal Towing at the smooth walls of the Neapolitan  
harbor how many tons for it must have been necessary to put an iron*



Nicola's parents made a striking contrast. It had struck whole generations of Mr Wharton's students when they had seen the pair together at University functions.

Mr Wharton was immensely tall, with thick glasses and a pleasant, ugly, frog-like face, permanently creased by much smiling. Twenty years of University life had not smoothed out the West Country burr from his voice, which lingered like an echo of his boyhood as a farmer's son. His feet were quite the largest that most people had ever seen. As he stood on the lecturer's platform his students had been known to watch those enormous shoes until, under the mesmeric effect of his voice, they seemed to spread wider and wider across the bare boards. But that was only on hot afternoons or on the rare occasions when even Mr Wharton could not make his subject interesting. Normally, his dry humour and the warm enthusiasm glinting in his brown eyes made him one of the most popular members of the staff.

Mrs Wharton was small and neat. She was a homely Yorkshirewoman, deft with her hands and quick with her tongue. She always pretended that she had no intellect and was quite out of her depth in bookish company. She might pretend to be a fool—but she deceived nobody who knew her at all well.

'Anything special to see in this place?' she inquired, when Nicola had kissed them both and slipped into her seat.

'Anything special!' echoed her daughter indignantly. 'I told you last night—it's the island where Odysseus met Nausicaa, and her father feasted him and gave him another ship to get home to Ithaca—'

'Oh, he's gone then?' said Mrs Wharton in mock disappointment.

'Yes, dear,' interposed her husband, 'about three thousand years ago. I'm afraid you've missed him.'

'Can't we see where he landed, Daddy?'

'We-ell . . .' said Mr Wharton with the reserved air of the true scholar who believes nothing that is not proved, 'we can see the place where some people *think* he landed. But whether he did—and whether even Corfu is the island Homer meant—whether, too, there was such a person as Odysseus, let alone Nausicaa and her parents—'

'Do stop, Daddy! Do n't spoil it all by going all septic.'

He roared with laughter. 'Sceptical, please—not septic—'

'You know what I mean. Not believing in anything.'

'You're quite right, Nicky darling', he apologized swiftly. 'As a matter of fact it's becoming much easier nowadays to accept a lot of the old legends. There was a dull phase, years ago, when scholars poured scorn on everything like that. But that passion for debunking everything is over now. Recent discoveries tend more and more to back up the ancient traditions. If they weren't always literally true, there was usually something in them.'

As they breakfasted they heard the anchor rattling down, and when they returned to the deck, equipped with cameras and sun-glasses and passports, they found that the ship had come to rest some little way out from the jetty, and that small boats were alongside to take passengers ashore. The town looked a gay jumble of tall, pale-washed buildings rising from behind the water-front. As their boat headed for the landing-place, Mr Wharton pointed out the cathedral straight in front and, away to the left, the old Venetian fortress crowning a headland with two little peaks.

'Those are what give Corfu its modern name', he explained. 'Corfu is the Italian version of "Korypho", and that was the Byzantine Greek for "twin peaks". But the classical Greeks called the island Corcyra—'

'Oh, I remember', Nicola interrupted. 'It comes into history a lot, when the Athenians were fighting the Spartans.'

'It does indeed. But if you're wondering why Corfu is now known by an Italian name instead of a Greek one—'

'I wasn't,' admitted Nicola, 'but I s'pose I should have been?'

'You certainly should. All Greek history is interesting - I've no patience with people who rule a line under the words "*Alexander the Great, died 323 B.C.*" and imagine they've finished with the subject.'

At that moment they came alongside the jetty and friendly boatmen handed them ashore. As they stood there, taking in the view and mustering their party, Mr Wharton managed to finish his explanation.

Corfu, and the other six Ionian Islands, had belonged for

hundreds of years to the great Republic of Venice. Indeed, through those long centuries when there had been no independent Greece at all, and when the rest of the country had been under the heel of the Turks, these islands alone had been able to defy the Sultan.

'Now notice the houses', he said as they made their way down a busy street opposite the jetty. 'See how tall they are? Lots of storeys? That's not typical of Greece at all—the Greek likes to spread himself out with a little low-built cottage and a plot of ground. These streets remind me much more of when I was in Malta during the war.'

'And Italy', said Mrs Wharton, remembering Brindisi and the Italian towns they had passed through on their journey.

'Exactly! It *is* the Italian influence—just as in Malta. That's what makes the Ionian Islands different from other parts of Greece, that and the *absence* of Turkish influence. There have never been any Moslem mosques here. And the place wasn't a battle-ground when the Greeks won their freedom in the eighteen-twenties.'

'What a rabbit-warren of narrow little streets', commented Mrs Wharton.

'Oh, it's *lovely*!' cried Nicola. 'Even if it isn't "typical"!'

With startling suddenness they came out upon a wide expanse of open ground, lined with trees. In front rose the citadel on its headland, cut off from the Esplanade by a deep moat, which was spanned by a bridge about sixty yards long.

'It's like the seaside', said Mrs Wharton.

'Well, it *is* the seaside, Mummy.' Nicola pointed to right and left of the citadel, where the blue water stretched away into the morning sun. Though they had walked away from the landing-place, they were facing the sea once more. The town was curved like a sickle, and they had cut across from the outer edge to the inner. Southwards, round the sweep of the bay, ran a balustraded promenade, rather deserted at that early hour of the day but probably (thought Nicola a shade wistfully) thronged with young life and gaiety towards the evening. But by then the *Angelica* would be well on her way.

'It's even more like England than you realize', said Mr Wharton. 'Do you know they play cricket here?'

'Cricket? Daddy, you're pulling our legs!'

'I certainly am not. There's a cricket club here—they often play teams from British ships. And beat them. This is where the matches are played, on the Esplanade.'

'This is extraordinary.' Mrs Wharton swung round from a bronze statue she had been studying, in front of a palatial white building with two handsome gates, each framing a vista of dancing waters and snow-streaked hills.

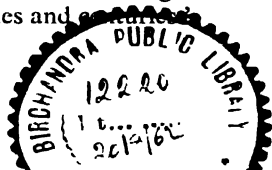
'What is, Mummy?'

'Even the statue is to an Englishman!'

It was quite true. It represented Sir Frederick Adam, British High Commissioner 1824–32.

For a short period—just half a century from the fall of Napoleon until 1864—the Ionian Islands had been a protectorate of the British Empire. Mr Wharton explained how it had come about. Napoleon had put an end to the ancient Venetian Republic and had garrisoned these islands with French troops. Most of the islands had been captured by a British expedition, and Corfu itself had been surrendered after the Battle of Waterloo. As there was then no independent Greek nation in existence, Britain had governed the islands through a series of High Commissioners—busts and monuments to these gentlemen seemed to be dotted all round the Esplanade. Other signs of British influence lingered in some of the particularly good roads which Corfu possessed, made at this time, and in the pure water supply for which this very man, Sir Frederick Adam, had been responsible. Corfiots still looked back gratefully to this period, and acknowledged their debt to these bygone British governors, all the more willingly because, in the middle of Queen Victoria's reign, Britain had voluntarily given up possession.

'By then, you see', said Mr Wharton, 'Greece was firmly established as a free nation—she'd won her independence from the Turks in 1829. She had a German king to start with, but he wasn't a great success, so there was a revolution. They slung him out, and started afresh with a Danish prince. Things looked more settled then, and Britain agreed to hand over the Ionian Islands to the new Greek king, so that the people could be united with their fellow-Greeks on the mainland and in the Aegean. Which, of course, they hadn't been for centuries and centuries.'



'I've just remembered something', said Mrs Wharton. 'Talking of royal families, wasn't the Duke of Edinburgh born here in Corfu?'

'I believe he was.'

'Well now, isn't that interesting?' Mrs Wharton looked about her with increased approval. Corfu had been beautiful before. Now, as the birthplace of Prince Philip, the island acquired a new glamour.

The building in front of them was the former royal palace, built for the British High Commissioners. The right-hand gate was named after St Michael and the left-hand after St George. The famous order of knighthood, the Order of St Michael and St George, which Nicola had sometimes seen mentioned in the honours lists on the Queen's Birthday and in the New Year at home, took its name from these very gates. The Prince Regent had instituted this order especially to honour outstanding men in the islands. Later, of course, it was given to British subjects elsewhere.

The palace was now a museum, but to Nicola's relief it was not open so early in the morning. Not that she did not like museums, but she knew that there would be plenty in Athens and the other places they hoped to visit. Just now she was more interested in seeing where Odysseus had landed after his shipwreck.

Fortunately, it had been arranged for the whole party to get into taxis at this point and drive along the sea-front to the old summer palace of the High Commissioners at the southern end of the bay. The Whartons were not very interested in the mansion itself, which was rather archly named 'Mon Repos'. The grounds were certainly beautiful, with winding paths and lush sub-tropical vegetation, and Mrs Wharton was much attracted to the beach nearby, with its various kiosks, cafés, and bathing-huts. It was deserted at half-past eight on a March morning, but they could easily picture it as it would be in a few weeks. Bathing would start in April, and the sea would be warm enough for it to go on until the end of October.

From 'Mon Repos', as Nicola's father had promised her, the little convoy of taxis drove on for a mile or two to Canoni, where there was a famous viewpoint commanding (among other things) the landing-place of Odysseus.

Canoni proved to be a semicircular terrace at the very tip of a steep headland. Once a cannon had stood there, hence the name, and the British garrison had always called the place One-gun Battery. It looked southwards across a narrow strait of water which had once been the entrance to a spacious harbour, much more sheltered than the modern one where they had left the *Angelica* at anchor. But in later times it had become silted up and now it was more of a shallow lake than part of the sea.

On the opposite shore, the guide told them, was a freshwater spring, gushing out close to the beach. It was called the Fountain of Cressida. It was where Nausicaa and her young ladies had been washing the family linen and playing with their ball when they had been startled by Odysseus emerging from the bushes.

'How do you know?' said Mr Wharton.

'It is the tradition, sir. Always. The story has been handed down among the people.'

'Anything to see?'

From the guide's expression, Nicola wondered whether he had ever been to look. Probably these conducted tours followed the same route, year after year.

'I am afraid, sir,' he answered, neatly dodging the question, 'there is not time to drive all the way round to that side. The ship sails again at ten o'clock. You must not miss the ship.'

On that point there was general agreement.

'Oh, what a dear little island!' said Nicola.

From the shore just beneath the terrace on which they were standing a causeway ran out across the smooth water to a tiny islet, completely covered with buildings. Further out was another one, rising steeply from the sea and dense with cypresses.

'I shall tell you', said the guide, frowning a little because Nicola had noticed something before she had been told to. 'In front, ladies and gentlemen, you see the convent of Vlacherna—here there are women-monks—nuns, you say? To go along the causeway one must remove shoes and stockings, and I regret there is not time. Beyond Vlacherna you are seeing the other island, which we call Ponticonisi. That is, in English, Mouse Island.'

He paused for the murmur of laughter which obviously, in his experience, always came at this point. It came.

'But also we call this island the Island of Odysseus. You will remember, after the father of Nausicaa had entertained him to a great banquet, he sent him back to his own island of Ithaca? And you will remember that Poseidon, the Sea-God—Neptune, you say?—was very angry. He could no longer prevent Odysseus from getting home, so he took revenge on the sailors of Corfu who had taken him. As their ship came back, and was in sight of port, the Sea-God turned the ship and the crew into a rock. And there', he ended triumphantly, 'you see the rock still. You will notice the likeness to a ship of that time?'

'Oh, yes', agreed most of the party.

'What about San Pantaleone?' inquired Mr Wharton mildly.

The guide looked uncomfortable. 'It is quite true', he said airily, 'there is another little island on the north-western side of Corfu, which some people think may have been this ship. But there are very good reasons for saying that this island you are now seeing is the one of which Homer wrote.'

'The best reason of all', Mr Wharton remarked to Nicola in an amused undertone as they were herded back to their cars, 'being that "there is not time, ladies and gentlemen" to take us to the other one! Shall I start a discussion on whether Homer was blind or not, and how qualified even *he* was to tell one island from another? And whether writing was known then, or whether he had to make up the *Odyssey* in his head?'

Nicola suppressed a giggle. 'I regret, Daddy, there is not time', she mimicked, as she squeezed into the taxi between her parents.

But despite her father's awkward questions, nothing would take from her the secret conviction that she had just been gazing at the very scenes of the adventures described in the poem.

'Look at the olive-trees', said Mr Wharton as they drove back. 'I've never seen anything like them elsewhere in Greece. They're like a forest. Usually they're kept closely pruned and lined up like soldiers. They look really beautiful when they're left to grow more naturally.'

'A good age, some of them', commented his wife.

A Canadian school-teacher in the front seat turned her head. 'Someone was telling me', she broke in, 'many of these trees go way back to the Venetians. It seems they offered the people a

subsidy—a silver crown or something—for every olive-tree they planted—’

‘A silver *crown*?’ echoed Nicola.

The teacher laughed. ‘That was a coin, I guess. ~~Something~~ to put in their pockets, not wear on their heads! Well, I reckon they got busy earning those crowns. The place is pretty thick with the trees.’

‘I think it’s the main crop in Corfu’, said Mr Wharton.

‘How funny!’ said Nicola. For the moment she could think of only one use for olives. She remembered the occasional little sherry-parties that her parents gave to the other College staff and their wives. She had once tried the hard green fruit that had been set out with the cheese-straws and other savouries. She had not thought much of olives. They tasted bitter and they did not come away from the stones at all easily. ‘Fancy a whole island making its living from olives! What a lot of sherry-parties it must need—’

‘You’re forgetting olive-oil’, said her father. ‘And in Greece they use far more of it than we do.’

‘I’m afraid all the food will be swimming in it when we get there’, Mrs Wharton forecast darkly.

‘Well, it is the basis of all cooking in the Mediterranean countries, my dear— but that’s an advantage, surely, if the cook knows his job? There’s hardly any butter, you see. Very few cows, because the grass isn’t good enough—’

‘I saw some cows this morning’, Nicola corrected him excitedly, ‘and the grass was lovely and green, just like English.’

‘I saw them too’, her father admitted patiently, ‘but that is just one more thing about the Ionian Islands that isn’t typical of Greece in general. It’s a damper climate this side, so they can keep a few cows.’

‘Do you mean to tell me’, demanded Mrs Wharton, ‘that I shan’t be able to buy butter in Athens? Or milk? Or cheese?’

‘I don’t say we shan’t, by going to the right shops. You can get most things in a big city. What I mean is that the average Greek doesn’t go in for butter—he gets the same food-value from his olives. As for milk and cheese, well, what’s wrong with goats? *They’re* everywhere. Goats and sheep.’

By this time they were back in the town, the taxis threading



their noisy way through the crowded streets. Nicola and her mother caught tantalizing glimpses of shops gay with hand-woven scarves and embroidered table-cloths, or shining with silverware elaborately wrought in the old Byzantine tradition. Mr Wharton was relieved that they had not time to investigate. It was far too early to start loading themselves with souvenirs.

The taxis drew up at the jetty. The boats were waiting to ferry them back to the *Angelica*. There she lay at anchor, her dark hull and glistening white superstructure mirrored in the calm water. Nicola had already grown quite fond of her. Now they were going to sail on together in the very wake of Odysseus to his own island of Ithaca. By this time tomorrow they would have reached Athens.

They were back on board in comfortable time. As it happened, there was some little delay before they sailed. Several times the warning siren wailed impatiently across the water and came echoing back from the ramparts of the citadel. Nicola saw two officers talking with worried expressions. Then they shrugged their shoulders and turned away. Orders rang out. The gangway was hauled up, and the ship got under way.

Nicola went in search of her parents who were already established in their deck-chairs in their chosen corner of the deck. 'We're awfully late', she grumbled, 'we could have had another half-hour ashore if only they'd told us.'

'It wasn't their fault', said Mr Wharton. 'We've been waiting for some silly fools who've lost themselves -and now the captain can't wait any longer.'

'You mean—the people have got left behind? I wonder who they were.'

'That English boy', said Mrs Wharton, glancing up from her novel, 'and his father.'

## CHAPTER II

### BIRD'S EYE VIEW

As the highly efficient representative of a popular news-agency, Jim Murry was more interested in people than in places.

Museums did not appeal to him—unless some valuable item had been stolen from them. History left him cold—except when it was hot history, made within the past few hours and still waiting to be written up for his readers. By his definition, Homer's *Odyssey* had long ceased to count as a 'good story'.

Not surprisingly therefore, he had scorned the suggestion that he and Martin should join with some of their fellow-passengers in a rush round the show-places of Corfu. Jim Murry was used to knocking about by himself. His happy-go-lucky blue eyes had twinkled in Korea and Morocco and Brazil, his lean brown face was known and welcome wherever foreign correspondents gather, in Lisbon, Washington, Singapore, and a host of other cities. Not for him, therefore, were guides and conducted tours.

Martin was content to tag along with his father wherever he went. It was so good to be together at all. They had seen so little of each other since Martin's early childhood. Mr Murry's roving disposition and carefree attitude to life had made him an enterprising journalist, but he had been rather less successful as a father. The private life of the Murry family had been erratic and unsettled. Since the death of Mrs Murry, some years before, there just had not been any family life worthy of the name. Martin had been shunted from relative to relative, and school to school, seeing his father at rare and doubtful intervals. Now, at last, Mr Murry had awoken to the fact that he had responsibilities to his son, as well as to his news-agency. He had decided that Martin was old enough now to go with him to his new assignment in Athens.

'I say, Dad, we must mind we don't lose our way.'

Martin glanced round him a little apprehensively as they plunged into the puzzling maze of narrow streets behind the water-front.

'What a worrier the lad is!' Mr Murry teased him good-naturedly. All the way through France and Italy, Martin had been

jumpy about one thing or another. Catching trains, finding hotel rooms, watching their bags for possible thieves. . . . The boy seemed to be lacking in self-confidence and any sense of security. It was high time, Mr Murry reflected, that he had been rescued from all those various aunts. It did not cross his mind that, if Martin lacked a sense of security, it might be due to his own over-casual attitude to the boy in the past.

They strolled along happily for half an hour, peering into the little shops and enjoying the bustle of an ordinary spring morning in Corfu. To Martin, everything foreign was of interest—he had never been abroad before. He was amused to see a nanny-goat being milked into a large jug outside the customer's front door, and tiny children running to school with leather briefcases in their hands, for all the world like big business men or government officials in England. He noticed the uniform of the policemen and the long black robe of a bearded priest, wearing a tall hat without a brim, rather like a chimney-pot. He looked very different from the cleanshaven priests in Italy with their low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats, and if Mr Wharton had been there he would probably have explained the significance of this moment in their journey. For they had passed, during the night, from the western world of the Roman Catholic church into the eastern world of the Greek Orthodox. Just as the strange lettering of the street-signs showed that they had moved from the sphere of Latin culture into that of Greek, the shape of a priest's hat symbolized the different branch of the great Christian family which was dominant in this corner of Europe. To Martin's father, however, as to Martin, it was just a different shape in hats. Of the varying religious beliefs beneath those hats the Murrys were completely ignorant.

It was not the only sight they saw that morning the full meaning of which was lost upon them.

Jim Murry had a quick eye and a deft pen for surface impressions. If required, he could have rattled off a vivid piece about their morning stroll through the deep, shadowy canyons of those winding streets. But if he had been suddenly challenged to say why the young men of Corfu still played cricket and named their club after an English poet (whom they called 'Vecron', softening the B to V as was their way in Greek)—or to explain why the Lion of

St Mark, badge of the Venetian Republic, was still to be seen on various buildings—he would have been unable to do so. Although, being a good journalist, he could very quickly have found out.

Martin, however, was not a newspaper editor, and his questions did not have to be answered. He had given up asking that sort of question before they had been halfway through Italy. Dad met them with a shrug and a wisecrack. ‘Background knowledge’ meant different things to different people. To some it meant history and geography and all kinds of school stuff. To Dad it meant inside information on the politics of the country he was sent to. Cabinet crises, government scandals, pacts and plots—that sort of thing.

Martin did not think he would like to be a journalist. It would be altogether too nerve-racking. Not that he hankered for a quiet, cabbage-like existence. He often thought of the Merchant Navy . . . That would be a good life—if ever he could manage the maths, and the other subjects he’d need, to qualify for his ticket.

Suddenly his father broke in upon his thoughts.

‘Anything you’d specially like to see?’ he inquired. He had suddenly remembered that this was the boy’s first trip abroad. He wanted to give Martin a good time.

‘I don’t know’, said Martin slowly. Then a thought struck him. He had heard people at breakfast talking about this chap Odysseus—the one the English girl had mentioned. He flushed painfully at the memory. It was quite true what she’d said, his education *had* been neglected. He wished he knew about these things, he wished he didn’t always feel out of it when people discussed them. That was the worst of changing schools so often. There were so many things he’d missed entirely, just as there were others he’d done twice and even three times over.

‘I *do* know, Dad. There’s a little island—some old legend about the sea-god turning a ship into a rock or something. Just a yarn, of course, but it’s supposed to be a rather smashing view. Could we go there?’

‘Why not? Is it far?’

‘Can’t be. The other people were going. They said it was only a few minutes out of the town. We’ve still time.’

'Oh, plenty of time', said Mr Murry cheerfully. 'We'll get a cab. Do you remember the name of this place?'

'I can find it in half a tick.' He thumbed through the pages of the guide-book and read out: "*At a distance it much resembles a petrified ship in full sail, and is pointed out by tradition as the galley of the Phaeacians—*"' Martin stumbled over the pronunciation of the unfamiliar name.

'O.K., O.K.,' said his father briskly, 'what's the place called, for the cab-driver?'

'Er—let me see—oh, yes—San Pantaleone—'

'San Pantaleone? Right you are.'

Martin never ceased to admire the way in which his father handled foreign taxi-drivers, porters, officials, shopkeepers, and similar people with whom a traveller has to deal. Without ever knowing more than a few phrases of the language concerned—and often less—Mr Murry always seemed to get what he wanted. He had a knack. Combining this with good-humour and determination, he was irresistible.

Now he simply glanced round, and before Martin could even identify a taxi amid the other traffic, one was pulling up beside them and a keen-eyed driver was leaning out, his fingers on the door-handle.

'San Pantaleone', said Mr Murry, bundling Martin into the taxi.

'San Pantaleone?' echoed the driver. His voice went up as he repeated the name. So did his thick eyebrows.

'San Pantaleone', Mr Murry answered firmly. 'Quick', he added tapping his wrist-watch. 'Pronto. Step on it. *Va benissimo.*'

'O.K.,' said the Greek. He shrugged his shoulders and the taxi slid forward.

Round the corner, they stopped for petrol, which seemed a little surprising as they were going only a mile or two out of the town. Then they were speeding westwards, with the sea not far below them on the right and the wooded hills rising to the left.

After some minutes Mr Murry leant forward, tapped the driver on the shoulder, and shouted inquiringly: 'San Pantaleone?'

The answer sounded very much like 'Nay', and it worried them for a moment, because they did not know that it was the Greek word for 'yes'; whereas, if the driver had meant 'no', he would

have said 'okhee', and they might conceivably have mistaken it for 'O.K.', rather oddly pronounced.

However, it was quite obvious that the man was making for San Pantaleone. He repeated the name, nodded, grinned, and drove faster than ever.

'How far did they say this place was?' grunted Mr Murry.

'I don't know. But only a few minutes' drive.' Martin looked anxious. 'It's getting late, Dad. Don't you think we ought to turn back?'

'Not now we're nearly there.'

'We don't want to miss that boat—'

'Relax,' said Mr Murry, 'I've never missed a boat yet.'

But when they came to a fork, and the taxi swung away from the coast and started to climb into the hills, even he began to get concerned. He called to the driver to stop and, as the car came to a standstill, he bent forward, pointing to his wrist-watch.

'How much further?' he demanded in English. 'Understand? How many kilometres? San Pantaleone? How long will it take?'

The taxi-man swivelled in the driving-seat, smiling politely. With the gentle courtesy of a cavalier taking a lady's hand, he drew Mr Murry's wrist forward across the back of the seat and then, with a long brown forefinger moving slowly round the dial of the watch, indicated that the journey out and back would take an hour. A slanting, upward gesture indicated that there was a stiff gradient to climb.

'Tell him to turn back, Dad!' Martin was getting jumpy. 'There just isn't time.'

Reluctantly, the journalist agreed. But it took a precious minute or two to make the driver grasp that the expedition was to be abandoned. He kept saying 'San Pantaleone' and pointing up into the mountains and pantomiming how delighted they would be with the view if only they would persevere.

'I don't doubt it', said Mr Murry crisply, 'but I'm sorry, old man, we just haven't the time today. We've got to be back in town before ten.' He pointed to the number, 10, on the dial of his watch.

The driver nodded vigorously. He laid his own finger-tip on the number and said: 'San Pantaleone!' Then, moving on to number 11, he said: 'Corfu.'

'No, no, that's not the idea! We've got to be in Corfu by ten! We've got to get back on board the *Angelica*—  
'*Angelica*?'

At the mention of the ship's name light dawned upon the taximan. Clearly ~~he~~ he had never realized that his passengers were intending to sail in her. He muttered to himself piously, set his teeth with a determined expression, and began to back the car to a place where he could turn. Obviously he felt that to reach the landing-place in time was a desperate venture, if not a hopeless one. But, as a good Greek, filled with the spirit of Thermopylae, he would do his best.

Alas, everything was against them! First the engine stalled in his over-anxiety to turn quickly. Then they ran into a flock of black, satanic-faced goats, which ebbed and flowed across the highway. Lastly, on the outskirts of the town, they overtook a funeral procession.

Faint and far-away, behind all the other noises, they could hear the plaintive moan of a ship's siren . . . then several sharp, staccato blasts, as if the *Angelica* were losing all patience.

When they reached the jetty her anchorage was empty. The bay was dotted with caiques, the graceful little sailing-boats of the Eastern Mediterranean, but the long hull of their steamer had just vanished round the headland.

\* \* \*

They were very sympathetic at the travel bureau.

It was quite obvious what had happened, and most unfortunate. Martin had got mixed up between the two different islets which claimed to be the one mentioned in the *Odyssey*. They had been heading for the more distant one, which could be seen from the mountain pass of San Pantaleone, whereas their fellow-passengers in the ship must have gone to Canoni.

'All right,' said Mr Murry philosophically, 'but what happens now? How do we get on to Athens?'

Here the clerk, who spoke good English, was not only sympathetic but helpful.

There were steamers of other lines, but none that day. There was a motorship across to the mainland at Higoumenitsa. 'That takes two hours. Then you must go to Yannina by road—it is not a very

good road, I am afraid—and over the Pindus Mountains. The scenery is very 'grand, but the surface . . .' He shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

'Sounds a long ride, and a rough one,' said Mr Murry. 'Aren't there any trains in these parts?'

'Not until you get over the Pindus Mountains to Kalambaka. It is a very difficult country for railways, you understand. It is all mountains, and very few people. It is Epirus, the famous country of our highland soldiers—' He pointed with a smile to a colourful poster, depicting a Greek soldier in stiff white kilt and gaiters. 'The Evzones', he said. 'Fine fighters. In Athens you shall see them on guard outside the King's palace.'

'If we ever get to Athens', grunted Mr Murry.

'Have you much baggage, sir?'

'I told you—it's all in the ship. We haven't a toothbrush even. Why?'

'There is a 'plane each day to Athens.' The Greek put out his hand to the telephone. 'I do not know if any seats are left for to-day, but if you wish I can inquire?'

'Go ahead! Now you're talking.'

They were in luck this time. Places were available in a 'plane due to take off within an hour or two. They were able to get some coffee and rolls—breakfast was by now a distant memory—and then they were shown into the bus which took them out to the little airport, south of the town.

Little it was, to Martin's surprised eyes, for though he had never flown himself he had several times been to meet his father or see him off at London Airport, and the films had made him familiar with the impressive buildings and milling crowds to be seen at other airports on the Continent or in America. At Corfu the waiting-room was just a wooden hut. Everything, including the 'plane, was small-scale and homely.

That, he was coming to realize, was typical of Greece.

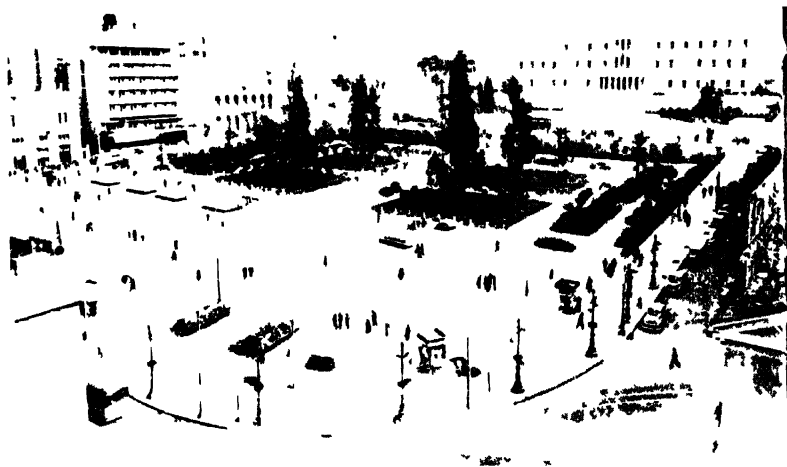
Greece was a small country. Her population of about seven or eight millions could have been housed in London or New York. But whereas London and New York were wealthy, Greece was poor. There was no money to waste on mere show. And, though modern inventions and ideas were well established, the ancient





ABOVE: The Acropolis with the Erechtheum (left) the Parthenon (right) and below) the Oleon. BELOW: The Erechtheum with its unusual portico: the pillars in the likeness of girls called caryatids.





*ABOVE: Constitution Square, with (left) Taksim and (right) The Parliament buildings. BELOW: 'Greek' cafes were for men. The fruit seller leaves his stall to drink coffee with a priest.*



ways of life still existed side by side with the new. The school-children might run to school carrying briefcases while some of their mothers walked to the public fountain with jugs on their heads as they had done in Homer's time. Driving out to the airport he had noticed black-clad old peasant-women sitting sideways on small, patient-looking donkeys—and, overtaking them on the same stretch of road, a magnificent American car and the last word in cheeky little motor-scooters.

Martin was naturally rather excited at the thought of his first flight, but he was sorry that his sea-trip had been cut short. He had looked forward to a long day in the *Angelica*, weaving in and out among the islands. Still, there it was. It was his own stupid fault, he told himself, for asking his father to go to San Pantaleone in the first place, and for getting muddled up by the guide-book. Dad had been jolly decent about all the trouble and extra expense which had been involved.

Mr Murry had already made friends with one of their fellow-passengers and was chatting away to him as they waited in the hut.

Mr Zancarol was a plump, middle-aged, prosperous-looking gentleman, who spoke English with an American accent. By birth, he said, he was a Corfiot—a native of Corfu—but for many years he had run a restaurant in the United States. He had been visiting his folks here, he explained, and now he was moving on to see his married sister in Athens.

'Ours is a good old Corfiot name', he told the Murrys proudly. 'Goes back to the connection with Venice. "Zancarol"—that comes from Italian, "San Carolo", I guess, what you'd call "St Charles". Yes, it's one of the best old names in the island, I reckon.' He sighed. 'Maybe you wonder why I left Corfu?'

'More scope in the States?' ventured Mr Murry.

'There's a living, anyway. Greece is a grand country for you visitors—and, well, it's always home to us Greeks, wherever we go. But it's poor. We've a saying, you know, "Poverty and Greece are sisters". There just isn't room for us all in the country. It's always been like that, back in history. And it's been worse in modern times. Back in the nineteen-twenties we had a war with Turkey, and a whole crowd of refugees came flooding in from

Asia Minor.' Mr Zancarol shook his head sadly. 'Some of us just *have* to get out, and make room for the rest.'

'Do you all go to America?' Martin inquired.

'Not all. You'll find Greeks everywhere. London, Paris, Cairo, Alexandria, 'most any place. But we always think of Greece as home. We keep in touch, we send money to the old folks, we come back whenever we can afford the trip—or if we strike lucky we come back for keeps. You'll hardly find a Greek village', said Mr Zancarol with solemn emphasis, 'not the most one-eyed, one-horse dump at the back o' beyond, where there isn't some family getting a few dollars to help out from some boy or other who's emigrated. Yes, sir! We don't forget our own country, or our folks. Why, we gave the very word "patriot" to the world!'

They were called forward now to take their seats in the 'plane. The engines roared, the 'plane began to run forward, and in a few moments Martin knew that they were air-borne. Mr Zancarol leant across the gangway and told him to be quick and look down.

'We're going over Canoni', he said. 'You'll see a little rocky island with cypresses all over it. Now that island was once a ship, way back in Homer's time, an' the story goes that—'

Martin was just in time to catch sight of the green tuft standing up out of the blue water. He looked up again and met his father's friendly wink. Well, they had seen the blessed thing after all—or rather the rival one. That was something.

\* \* \*

In a few minutes the sea had slipped beneath them and they were over the mainland.

Seen from up there, Greece reminded Martin of a great humpy ciderdown quilt, patterned in grey and brown and white and green. What mountains! No wonder there was no railway across this region, and not many roads! Did anyone live there? They must, for every now and again he saw a cluster of houses, a white-washed church or monastery crowning some hilltop. It must be a hard life in such places.

Mr Zancarol leant across the gangway again. He had taken a fancy to Martin and was disposed to be friendly.

'Beautiful, eh?'

'Yes!'

'Reckon this is how it must have looked to those old gods—Zeus and Apollo and that crowd. Sitting up on Olympus and looking down on ordinary folks.'

'I—I expect so. . . . It's all terribly rocky, isn't it?'

'I'll say. You know they tell an old story about that. When the Lord was making the world, He started in by putting all the earth through a sieve. He put down a heap of soil in one place for one country, France maybe, and a heap of soil for another, it might be Germany or Italy, we'll say, and so He went on with all the countries of the world. Then, when He'd finished, He took all the stones and threw them away over His shoulder. That was Greece!'

Mr Zancarol rocked with laughter. Martin thought the little story gave a very vivid idea of the Greek landscape. He could understand better, now, why so many of the inhabitants were forced to emigrate. It was sad, because he could also understand, looking down on those snow-sprinkled crags and tree-tufted valleys, how reluctant they must be to leave such a beautiful homeland.

It was a clear day. Visibility was perfect, and, flying high to avoid possible air-currents above mountains which themselves rose in places to more than seven thousand feet, the travellers had a bird's eye view stretching for miles and miles in every direction. It seemed no time before Martin was exclaiming:

'The sea! Look, there's the sea again!'

'Sure', said Mr Zancarol amiably.

'But it was behind us when—'

'And now it is in front. In Greece you are never far from the sea. But this is the Aegean now. It was the Ionian Sea, way back there.'

Sea and mountains, ships and sheep . . . that was Greece, he explained. Every Greek was at heart either a mountaineer or a sailor, and sometimes both.

'Can't seem to help it. Look at those islands, way out. See them?'

'Yes—'

'We've got scores of islands, hundreds of islands. *I* was born on an island, the best island of them all', declared Mr Zancarol with a grin. 'Sure, every Greek says that—it just is that I'm right, that's

all. I was raised in sight of the sea. Most of us are. Even the mainland folk mostly have blue water just round the corner.'

'I hadn't thought of the Greeks as sailors much', Martin confessed, 'though of course the *Angelica* is a Greek ship.'

'Let me tell you something', said Mr Zancarol wagging his brown finger. 'We're the oldest sea-going nation still in the business. Why, it was a Greek discovered Britain. Yes, *sir*! And long before that Italian, Columbus, went off and found America! You'll see the Greek flag in every port, the whole world over. That's what helps Greece earn her living. It's commonsense for a small country with too many folks for too little land. Take to the sea in a big way. The Norwegians do just the same. That's the answer. Yes, *sir*!'

They flew on. To the left, Martin made out a long thin island lying close to the mainland, so near that the narrow strait between was to be guessed at rather than seen. Mr Zancarol said it was called Euboea. To the right, in front, lay Aegina and Salamis. Below stretched the city of Athens, its suburbs creeping out to the foothills and seawards down to its satellite port, Piraeus, its big harbour crowded with shipping.

The 'plane circled and began to lose height.

'This is it', said Mr Zancarol cheerfully. 'Hellenicon Airport. Down we go.'

## THE WINE-DARK SEAS

STEADILY, purposefully, the *Angelica* steamed southwards into the golden morning. The sea, Nicola observed, was a rich purplish-blue. Homer was always referring to the sea as 'wine-dark', and she thought it a fine poetic adjective, but at the same time she wondered what colour the wine could have been in those far-off days. She asked her father if it could really have looked like sea-water.

He laughed. 'I haven't the least idea. I certainly shouldn't be surprised if it *tasted* like sea-water. Some of their modern wine always suggests turpentine to me.'

'Oh, Daddy!'

'No, I'm not joking. It's called *retsina*. They flavour it with resin. They like it that way. It's an acquired taste. I've just never acquired it, that's all.'

'If Homer had called the sea "grape-dark" it might have been more like it.'

'There's no logic in these matters. What we call "white" wines at home are much more of a gold<sup>n</sup> yellow.'

'Never mind. I still like "wine-dark seas". It sounds good, even though it isn't awfully sensible.'

'Like a lot of the best poetry', said her father with a chuckle.

The remainder of the morning passed pleasantly. Nicola was sorry only for one thing—that the English boy and his father had missed the boat. It would be a great nuisance for them and probably a considerable extra expense. She was disappointed, too, for her own sake. Martin had seemed nice, even though a bit touchy. If they had got on all right, they might have arranged to meet again in Athens. It would be rather lonely there, at least until she started school after Easter and had a chance to make friends.

Meanwhile, she was really quite content to lie back in a deck-chair beside her parents, and watch the wild coast of Epirus drift slowly by, a little paler and hazier now that the heat of the day was increasing.

From time to time they saw local fishermen in caiques, with

graceful, triangular lateen sails gliding like sharks' fins across the distant water. Some of these vessels were quite large, said Mr Wharton. A good-sized caique might be a hundred and fifty tons. They were the normal means of transport between the innumerable little islands of Greece. In some respects, both in design and in navigation, they had changed little since the days of Odysseus.

'You still see them fix an oar through a loop of rope or leather, instead of a rowlock', he said, 'just as Homer describes it in Book Four of the *Odyssey*.'

When they came out from lunch the coast seemed further off and the mountains had receded almost out of sight.

'Oh, dear,' said Nicola, 'it's as though we're going away from Greece again.'

Mr Wharton opened out a map and showed her that they were having to edge westwards to clear a big island called Levkas, which was so close to the mainland that it could easily have been mistaken for a peninsula thrust out from the coast. There was another reason why the mountains of Epirus seemed to have moved back into the distance: the ship was now passing a place where there was a wide expanse of almost land-locked water, the Gulf of Arta. The narrow entrance to this lagoon was hardly visible from the *Angelica*, and the level sheet of water behind it was completely hidden. Only the map explained why the mountainous coast changed suddenly to a low, thin line above the waves.

'Actium used to stand there', he said. 'Remember?'

'Actium? Why, Antony and Cleopatra! You mean where the naval battle was?'

'Yes. The battle must have been almost exactly where we are at this moment, I should think. The two fleets met just outside the entrance to the Gulf, and as there must have been about two hundred galleys on each side they would have been spread over a pretty wide area of sea.'

Mrs Wharton glanced up from her novel. 'I never realized that Cleopatra fought a naval battle against Antony', she remarked.

'Oh, *Mummy*! They didn't fight each other—they were in *love*!'

'That doesn't prove they didn't fight each other.'

'Oh, *really*', said Nicola disgustedly. 'They were fighting on the same side—against Octavius Caesar. Antony was doing all right,



but Cleopatra got jittery. She went off, and took all the Egyptian galleys with her, and when Antony saw her go, he was so dippy about her he went too. So Octavius won the battle.'

'I'm not surprised, in the circumstances.'

At about four o'clock Mr Wharton called his daughter to the rail. He pointed. 'There you are, my dear. That's what you've been waiting for, I think.'

'Ithaca?' Her eyes shone. She looked eagerly at the twin mountain-masses rising from the sea.

'The very place. The home of Odysseus. "*A barren isle—save for the sons she breeds*"', he quoted softly.

So this was the place to which Odysseus had struggled home, all those long years after the siege of Troy! This was the island where King Alcinous' sailors had carried him ashore, still asleep, and left him on the beach, surrounded with his gifts. This was the scene of those exciting last chapters in the story, when he had reappeared, disguised, in his former kingdom and taken a terrible revenge on the men who were pestering his faithful wife, Penelope.

'I suppose there isn't time to go ashore?' Nicola inquired wistfully. Half of her was longing to set foot on this legendary island, but the other half was nervous of getting left behind, like the English boy and his father at Corfu.

'I'm afraid not. It's only scheduled as a half-hour stop—and it may be even shorter as we're a bit late. We don't go right in, anyhow. We lie outside, and a boat takes off any passengers.'

The little island was scarcely more than a range of craggy hills, rising at each end to well over two thousand feet, but sinking in the middle to a strip of land so low and narrow that any moderately strong giant could have snapped it in two and made twin-islands instead of one. The *Angelica* anchored off this central point, where the higher land curved round from either side to form the jaws of a sheltered haven. From between these jaws a boat emerged with fresh passengers coming to embark.

'Remember the description?' Mr Wharton asked Nicola as they hung over the rail, watching. He quoted the sonorous hexameter lines, but Nicola's Greek was not nearly good enough yet for her to understand them, so he obligingly repeated them in J. W. Mackail's translation:

*'The fields of Ithaca a haven hold  
 Called after Phorcys' name, the Sea-God old.  
 Two jutting headlands breakii. & sheer in cliff  
 Stretch seaward, and the harbour-mouth enfold.'*

'It fits perfectly, Daddy!'

'That bit does, yes. I don't think all the other details in the poem do. But there's no reason to suppose that Homer ever came this way himself—whether he was blind or whether he had two good eyes. Nothing's certain about Homer, but he probably belonged to the far side of Greece. Not even the mainland, but right over on the Asia Minor fringe.'

Only one passenger went off in the boat, but several came on board. There was an old priest with a wonderful curly grey beard. There were two young men going off to do their military service, looking half sad and half excited at the prospect of seeing the bigger world. And there was a brisk, cheerful young woman, who proved to be a teacher going home to Patras for Easter.

She smiled at Nicola more than once when they met on the deck, and it was not long before they drifted into conversation.

'You *do* speak good English', Nicola congratulated her shyly.

'Oh no! I practise when I can. But I am not good. You see, when I was at school it was during the war, and our country was occupied, and at that time the enemy would not permit English to be taught. And of course—' a shadow flitted briefly across her face—'our education suffered other interruptions.'

'Interruptions?'

'Oh, yes. Even when the world war ended in 1945, for a long time there was fighting in Greece. At first, even in Athens—what you call civil war, you know. Then in the hills, though that was more in the north, towards the end, near to the frontier. And then, when we had peace at last, and I was grown up and become a teacher, here in Ithaca, we had the terrible earthquakes.'

'I remember hearing about them on the radio. Did you have them in Ithaca?'

'But certainly! In Vathy—that is the town, you know—I do not think the damage was quite so bad as in the other islands, but it was quite bad enough. Great tidal waves came up over the quays—I did not myself see them, but afterwards the houses near the

harbour were standing in pools of sea-water. And in the villages, also, in the hills, it was very bad. Some villages I know were almost entirely destroyed.'

'How awful! Were lots of people killed?'

'No. There we were very fortunate. You see our houses are small, mostly—if they had been tall houses, such as you have in London, the people would have been crushed under the ruins. But many of our people live in little cottages, not touching each other, and if there is an "upstairs" often the staircase is outside. That helps when there is fire, you see. Often, an earthquake makes a fire afterwards—that is another danger, and extra damage. The stove is perhaps broken, and the fire is scattered, and then perhaps the furniture or the wooden beams catch light.'

'Was your home destroyed?'

'The house where I live in Vathy? No. Only the walls were cracked. But for several nights we slept in tents. You see, we were afraid there would be more earthquakes. It was safer to be in tents.'

In response to Nicola's interested questionings, the teacher told her more of the disaster. Nicola had not realized all the other troubles which followed an earthquake—not only fire, but the cutting off of drinking-water and electricity and telephones, the lack of food, and the danger of epidemics. A special problem in this case had been the destruction and damage done to many of the olive-presses. The olive-harvest was the mainstay of the islanders' existence. That season they were expecting a bumper crop.

It had been gathered in the end, said the teacher, in spite of all difficulties, and somehow, with everyone helping everyone else, there had not been much waste. The outside world had been generous with aid of other kinds—food, tents, blankets, tools, medical supplies, everything.

'Naturally our own government helped us', said Miss Kallinikos, 'but other governments were most kind, and private people also in many countries. I think the Americans gave us most, but the British gave most quickly—your Navy was the first to come. At Ithaca it was your warship, H.M.S. *Wrangler*—such a strange name for such a good friend!' She laughed. 'And there were

Italians and French and many other navies—even the little navy of Israel sent us help. And there were strange aeroplanes that go like this—'

'Helicopters?' Nicola exclaimed, as the Greek woman gestured. Helicopters on Ithaca! How Homer would have loved to add that marvel to his poem!

Altogether, said Miss Kallinikos, in Ithaca and the two larger islands, Cephalonia and Zante, about 33,000 houses had been destroyed. Afterwards there had been a great reconstruction programme, which was still being carried out. Families were being lent money to rebuild their homes, and geologists had surveyed the ground to suggest safer places for the future. No less than a hundred and fifty villages had been recommended for rebuilding on new sites. American aid had provided much of the necessary funds.

'And also your own British Government has paid for the building of one thousand houses. And France has given five hundred.'

When Nicola began asking questions about her ordinary life and work as a school-teacher, Miss Kallinikos opened her suitcase and brought out a copy of the first reading-book she used with her smallest pupils. It was such a gay-looking little book that Nicola cried out with pleasure, and very soon both her parents were looking over her shoulder as she turned the leaves.

'What fun!' said Nicola. 'I wish I'd had a book like this when I was little.'

The cover showed a small girl with plaits, in a red dress, showing an open book to her still smaller brother in blue shorts and a yellow-striped shirt. There were lively end-papers with frolicking kittens and fluffy birds, pop-eyed fish, and frogs and bees and butterflies and caterpillars. And on the title-page, also in bright cheerful colours, were more little creatures—a crab and a snail, a mouse and a lizard.

'You can learn quite a lot about Greek life from this', said Mr Wharton appreciatively as they dipped into the book itself.

It was true. Some of the pictures, certainly, only reminded one that children are much the same in all lands—that they cry when they smash a jug and hold out their hands delightedly when Father brings them a present, that they like playing soldiers and

taking flowers to Granny and buying ice-cream in the street, and that they enjoy rides on rocking-horses and roundabouts. Still, it was interesting to see that Greek children were much the same at heart as the boys and girls at home.

Other pictures, though, could only have come from a foreign land. The little boy eating a ripe fresh fig, the little girl puffing out her cheeks to blow on the charcoal burning in its small square opening in the top of the tiled kitchen stove, the oxen drawing the plough, the shepherd sitting under the almond-blossom and playing his pipe just as in ancient days, the peasant-women cutting corn with sickles, the men threshing and winnowing the grain on a circular threshing-floor and then carrying it in sacks, on donkeys, to the white-aproned miller standing in the doorway of his little water-mill . . . from pictures such as these, Mr Wharton pointed out, one could learn a lot about home-life and country-life in modern Greece.

'You know', said his wife with a twinkle in her eye, 'if I had a book like this I could just about learn the Greek alphabet—given time!'

It did look easy in this attractive reader. The letter T was illustrated by a picture of three little boys marching behind another who was blowing a trumpet. The only print ran:

Τά τὰ τὰ. Τα τὰ. Τοτ'

Then, to teach the letter L (Λ as a capital, λ as a small letter), three small girls were dancing round a doll on a chair, clapping their hands and singing:

Λά λὰ λὰ λὰ λὰ.  
"Ολα λαλαλά Λόλα.

Even Mrs Wharton could read that.

Nicola was proud that she could pick out a number of words that she had already learnt at school. But, when she said them aloud, Miss Kallinikos could not make out what she meant. Mr Wharton laughed and came to the rescue.

'That's always the snag—the difficulty', he explained to the teacher. 'The main difference between the classical Greek we teach in schools and the modern Greek you talk is one of pronunciation and accent. They tell a good story about our prime minister in Queen Victoria's time—Mr Gladstone—'

'Ah, Mr Gladstone! I have heard of him. It was he, I think, who persuaded your Queen to give up the Ionian Islands to us? He was a good friend of Greece.'

'Yes, and a great classical scholar. Well, it seems he once came to Athens, and when they had made speeches of welcome and so on, he thought he would answer them in Greek. But of course it was the classical Greek he had learnt at Eton and Oxford.'

'And the people? They did not understand?'

'Well,' chuckled Mr Wharton, 'they listened very politely, and afterwards one of them said he had never realized before that the English language was so like their own!'

When the laughter had died down, Miss Kallinikos said, more seriously:

'Of course, there was a very long argument in our country, when we gained our freedom from the Turks, what kind of language we should adopt officially. Naturally the people had gone on talking Greek among themselves during all those centuries, but the language had changed in some ways since ancient times. Turkish words had crept into use—"caïque", for example, is Turkish for a boat—and other words we took from the Italians and from the Franks who came to Greece at the time of the Crusades.'

'English is an awful mixture, too', said Nicola encouragingly. 'And anyhow you *have* to have new words for things like aeroplanes that the ancient Greeks didn't know about.'

'That is true. All the same, there was a strong movement to purify the language—to get rid of all these newer words—and to get back to the Greek of Plato and Aristotle. The champion of this side was a scholar named Koraés. But against him was a fine poet, Solomós—' Miss Kallinikos paused. 'Perhaps you do not know that Greece has had her modern poets? We did not stop, you know, with Pindar and Sappho and Euripides!'

'Oh, I know about Solomós', put in Mr Wharton swiftly. 'He wrote your patriotic song, didn't he? The *Hymn to Liberty*.'

'That is so.' The Greek girl was obviously pleased. 'Solomós lived on the island of Zante—it is further south, and we shall not pass it', she explained to Nicola, 'because the ship will turn into the Gulf of Corinth. Solomós was a younger man—he was in his

twenties when we were fighting our War of Independence, and he lived until 1857. He said that we must begin to write the everyday Greek which the people spoke, that we must print this in our books and teach it in our schools. He felt as the great Italian poet Dante had felt long ago. It was Dante, you know, who chose to write in Italian instead of in Latin, and so helped to fix the Italian language.'

'I think Solomós was right', said Nicola. 'Fancy what it would be like if everyone had to start talking English like Shakespeare!'

'I agree', said Miss Kallinikos. 'A language is a living thing, it grows and changes like a person. So, for the most part, the policy of Solomós was adopted. We Greeks are very, very proud of our ancient literature, of course—sometimes our critics say we are *too* proud, too ready to rest—' She hesitated, and looked inquiringly at Mr Wharton—'I forget your English phrase . . .'

'To rest on your laurels?'

'That is it. To say to the world, "look at us, we gave you Homer and Plato, wonderful sculpture and architecture and many such things, Greece has already done enough". But that is foolish. These things were done long ago. Not by us, but by our ancestors. We know that Greece must earn her place among the modern nations. We have our own poets and novelists and other writers. And they must make a new Greek literature with the language people speak today in the fields and in the *áfés*. In other things also—in music and art, in science, trade, industry, everything—we must be ashamed to sit still and do nothing. But it is sometimes difficult', she concluded with a sigh, 'because we are a small country and very poor, and many times our progress is stopped by war and revolution, and they are much worse than the earthquakes.'

Shortly after Miss Kallinikos had come on board, the ship had made another brief stop at Sami, on the neighbouring island of Cephalonia, which was a great deal larger than Ithaca—larger indeed than Corfu, and with one peak, Mount Aenos, rising to well over five thousand feet and mantled with fir-trees. At half-past six the *Angelica* had left Sami, steering almost due east into the jaws of the Corinthian Gulf, the long stretch of water which almost severs the Peloponnese, the southerly portion of the

mainland, from the rest of the country which stretches northwards to Albania and Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Nicola did not notice this part of the journey very much. It was getting dark by the time they came out from dinner and her acquaintance with Miss Kallinikos was developing. And even if it had still been broad daylight, and she had had no one to talk to, there is a limit to the number of hours anyone can stare at a rugged coastline, however romantic it looks, gliding past the ship's rail some miles away.

But her father could not let her pass by two historic scenes without knowing about them, even though there was really nothing to see.

The first was the site of another famous naval battle, Lepanto. Here, on an October Sunday in 1571, a huge armada of Turkish galleys had been defeated by Don John of Austria, with a mixed Christian force of Spaniards, Venetians, and other Italians. Among the Spaniards had been Cervantes, later the author of *Don Quixote*. It had been a most important victory because it had checked the sea-power of the Turks, who were then threatening to push their conquests westwards into the very heart of Europe. Mr Wharton told Nicola she must read the exciting modern poem called *Lepanto* by G. K. Chesterton, because it gave such a vivid idea of the battle—

*'The crescent of the cruel ships whose name is mystery . . .'*

And the crashing broadsides—

*'Gun upon gun, ha! ha!  
Gun upon gun, hurrah!  
Don John of Austria  
Has loosed the cannonade.'*

Then, as the *Angelica* steamed forward into the darkness, there were memories of an earlier English poet, Lord Byron. Somewhere to port, on a low-lying coast shrouded in the gloom, was the little town of Missolonghi. During the Greek War of Independence it had been a centre of patriotic resistance. Three times—in 1822, 1823, and 1825—it had been besieged by Turkish armies. On the last occasion the desperate population, men, women and children, had fought their way out through the



trenches, only to be massacred by the enemy, while those who had stayed to make a last stand set fire to their own powder-magazine, blowing themselves up with a number of their hated attackers. Altogether, the War of Independence (Nicola concluded with a shudder) must have been a terribly cruel affair. But, as her father pointed out, you had to know something about it if you were going to understand modern Greece.

And you had to understand why her school in Athens, and the cricket-club in Corfu, and a hundred other institutions, streets, hotels and so forth were named after Byron, and why he, more than any other Englishman before or since, was remembered and loved in Greece. It was he who, when the Greek rebels were poor and friendless, had used his reputation to win them publicity and help in England and other countries. Not satisfied with speaking and writing and giving his money generously, he had come out in person to fight for them—and at Missolonghi, in 1824, he had caught a fever and died.

‘His heart is buried at Missolonghi’, said Miss Kallinikos. ‘But his body was taken to England.’

‘Yes’, said Mr Wharton, ‘it lies at Hucknall in Nottinghamshire—near his old home of Newstead Abbey. I think your government always sends a wreath for his grave.’

‘I am glad. Lord Byron we shall never forget.’

The ship forged on over a sea that was now darker than the darkest wine. In an hour or so, said Miss Kallinikos, they should be seeing the lights of Patras.

## CHAPTER IV

### THROUGH THE CORINTH CANAL

NICOLA begged to stay up to see Miss Kallinikos go ashore at Patras, which they were due to reach at ten-thirty. As she pointed out to her mother, there was sure to be a great deal of noise, with clanking chains and people rushing about the deck, so that sleep would be impossible.

'Is anyone meeting you?' Mrs Wharton asked the teacher. She was secretly a little curious that so attractive a young woman should not be married, and she wondered if at least there would be a fiancé waiting on the quay.

'Oh, yes, my father', said Miss Kallinikos disappointingly. 'He will have the car. We live a little distance out of the town.'

'Is Patras a big town?'

'Certainly! There are sixty-five thousand people.'

'About the same as Worcester or Gloucester', commented Mr Wharton. 'Equal to our average county town—much smaller than the big industrial cities, of course.'

'It is the third town in Greece', declared Miss Kallinikos with a touch of local pride in her tone.

'Really? Yes, I suppose it must be. But it's a long way behind Athens and Salonika, surely?'

'That is true. Athens, with Piraeus and all the suburbs, has more than one million people. That is more than is good, when we are so small a nation. One person in seven lives at Athens. I do not know how many people in Salonika, exactly, but I think many many more than at Patras. Perhaps one third of a million persons in Salonika. All the other towns in Greece are quite small. Twenty, thirty, forty thousand people.'

'Is Patras nice?' asked Nicola.

'It is my home, Nicola!'

'I mean, is there much to see?'

The teacher smiled. 'There is not much for the tourist, perhaps. The town has much history, but twice it was burnt down by the Turks, so there are not fine ancient places as you will see in other parts of Greece. In the middle it is perhaps ugly—it is for business,



*A corner of the Plaka - old Turkish part of Athens on the northern slopes of the Acropolis. Tiny children ran out to stare.*



ABOVE The church at Daphni. They filed into the court and — Two great expresses  
flanked the steps. BELOW The Lyones looked very dashing in their white  
pleated kilts.



you see—but further out, where I live, there are nice houses and many trees.'

The chief business of Patras, she explained, was to do with shipping and the export of currants. Her father was concerned with this trade, which was very important to Greece.

'If you come to Patras while you are in Greece, you must call upon my family. And if it is in the summer holidays, I shall be at home myself. But I am afraid,' she added sadly, 'you will not trouble to come to Patras. You wish rather to see the ancient temples and theatres—'

'Oh, you never know', said Mr Wharton good-naturedly. 'It's very kind of you.'

'Well, you will write to me, Nicola?' Miss Kallinikos scribbled both her addresses on a piece of paper, and Nicola wrote down the address of the flat which her parents were renting for the summer from an English acquaintance in Athens.

A little while afterwards the *Angelica* nosed her way alongside the quay. Numerous figures were standing about, and cars were parked, under the glare of the harbour lamps. Suitcase in hand, Miss Kallinikos went tripping down the gangway, and they saw a middle-aged man in a light suit start forward to meet her. They embraced joyfully and moved off towards one of the cars. The girl looked back and waved her hand to the faces along the rail before she disappeared.

'A nice girl', Mrs Wharton reflected. 'Should have thought she'd have been married by now. Anyhow, I thought that kind of thing was still arranged by their parents in this part of the world?'

'I think it still is, quite often,' said Mr Wharton, 'though more and more young people make ordinary love-matches just as they do with us. I imagine most of the country folk stick by the old ways, with family conferences and dowries and so forth, but modern ideas are spreading in the towns. Some Greek girls are as shy and secluded as they used to be in days gone by, and others go off and have careers and act on the films and win beauty competitions in glamorous swim-suits. No, I can't think how our little friend has stayed single.'

'I can', said Nicola, who had the knack of worming out vital information and the nerve to ask direct questions when all else

failed. 'She had a boy-friend. He was killed fighting in the troubles after the war.'

\* \* \*

Nicola woke up in the middle of the night.

The ship's engines seemed to have stopped. The rhythm which had previously lulled her had now ceased. A harsh yellow light, was slanting through the open port-hole. It cut a swathe through the darkness of the cabin, revealing tumbled blankets, dresses on hangers, and all the paraphernalia of several travellers sleeping in a limited space.

Nicola sat up and peered through the port-hole.

Instead of darkness and stars and perhaps the dim hint of a mountain-coastline, her somewhat bleary gaze met a smooth wall of solid rock. It appeared as if the *Angelica* were lying at the foot of a high cliff, and only a few yards from it. Which—for a vessel as large as the *Angelica*—seemed a dangerous position, however deep and calm the water might be.

What was happening?

She could hear voices, ringing out with that hollow clarity that voices seem to possess when one wakes to hear them at an early hour of the morning. The ring that voices have when they echo down long, empty railway platforms among milk-churns and bales of newspapers when one's train stops during an all-night journey.

At least there was no note of panic in these voices, so presumably the ship was not aground. Whatever was happening seemed to be quite normal. As she became more and more wide awake, she remembered.

They must have reached the Corinth Canal. Daddy had said they would—he had been sorry that they had to go through during the night, because he said it was a sight worth seeing. Other people evidently thought the same, to judge from the hurried footsteps outside the cabin-door.

She disliked missing things. In no time she had lowered herself from her bunk, put her coat on over her pyjamas, and let herself silently out of the cabin.

On deck the first person she met was her father, similarly clad. She glanced up at him, half afraid she would be scolded and chased back to bed.

'Just in time', he said with kindly approval. 'I was wondering how on earth I could get hold of you. Couldn't very well come knocking on your door and waking up all those women.'

'This is the canal, isn't it?'

'Rather. Pretty terrific, isn't it?'

It was like a giant railway-cutting. Sheer walls of yellowish, clear-cut limestone soared aloft on either side, lit at intervals by powerful electric lights. They seemed tremendously high. They vanished into the gloom beyond the range of the lamps. By straining her eyes upwards Nicola thought she could perhaps just distinguish where the man-made cliffs ended and gave place to a thin band of paler gloom which must be the sky. She felt as though she were in a toy boat at the bottom of a deep and narrow gutter.

'How ever high are the sides?' she asked in an awed tone.

'That's the one thing the guide-book doesn't tell us. I expect the height varies in different places. But it must be quite considerable. There's a bridge across the top, further along, and we have to go under it, masts, funnel, and all.'

'Will it take us very long to go through?'

'Not very. It's four miles—but, as you can see, we're only creeping along.'

'Couldn't we go any faster?'

'Well, navigation's rather tricky. We might bump the sides—the canal is only about seventy feet wide, and it doesn't leave a lot of room to spare with a ship this size. There's a current to reckon with—'

'A current? On a canal? How funny!'

'There are lots of currents in the sea.'

'Of course, I was forgetting. I was thinking of canals at home.'

'This current runs at anything from one knot to three. They have to allow for that.'

There was a brief silence while they watched the lights glide by at regular intervals. 'I wish Martin was here', she said suddenly. 'He'd be interested.'

'Martin?'

'That boy who got left behind yesterday.'

'Oh, yes.'

'He's keen on ships and things.'

'Well, I expect they'll come along on the next boat, and he'll see it then.'

'Yes, of course, he will. All the same. . . .' She did not finish her remark.

Mr Wharton told her some more about the canal. It shortened the voyage to Athens by just over two hundred miles. In ancient days fleets had sometimes been dragged across this narrow isthmus on rollers to avoid the long voyage round the southern tip of the Peloponnese. The Athenians and the Spartans had both done it; so had Octavius Caesar when he was pursuing Antony and Cleopatra after their defeat at Actium.

'The Roman emperor Nero started to make the first canal', said Mr Wharton. 'He dug the first bit himself with a golden spade—'

'Just like the Royal Family nowadays! I mean, laying foundation-stones and opening things.'

'Exactly. And Nero was personally very keen on this idea. But by the time they'd cut half a mile through the isthmus, there was a revolt in another part of the Empire and he had more urgent things to attend to.'

'Didn't any of the other emperors go on with it?'

'No, it wasn't tackled again apparently until 1881. A French company worked away at it for about eight years, and when they gave up it was finished by a Greek firm. It was opened in 1893.'

'Twelve years! I'm not surprised.' Looking at those smooth walls of limestone Nicola tried to imagine how many tons of rock it must have been necessary to cut and move, to drive this channel four miles from sea to sea. One had to remember the unseen depth below the water-line as well as the height above. The guide-book said that the canal was twenty-six feet deep. 'And it's been open ever since then?' she inquired.

'More or less. It was closed for some time at the end of the last war—it had been blocked in places by demolishing the sides. It isn't all hard rock, actually. There are stretches where it's just earth and even in peacetime they occasionally have landslides, and have to close the canal temporarily. When I was here last', he went on with a note of amusement in his voice, 'the Germans had left a tanker sunk just outside the eastern end, as well as blowing



up the bridges and blocking the canal with rolling stock. It was a considerable engineering job to open it again, but they did it by 1948. Ships have been going through ever since.'

They passed under the road and railway bridges which link the north of Greece with the south. A few minutes later Nicola realized with a thrill, as the *Angelica* quickened her speed and thrust forward into open water again, that they were now at last in the Aegean Sea.

'Piraeus at seven, my dear.'

She looked at her watch. 'Oh, Daddy, it's not worth going back to bed. Look at the sky! I'm sure it's getting light in front. May I stay up and see the islands, and watch us go into the harbour? May I? Please?'

'I don't know what your mother would say.' Her father surveyed her with some alarm. 'You went to bed late, you were up early yesterday morning to see Corfu, and before that you—'

'Oh, *Daddy!*' Nicola's freckled face assumed its most wheedling expression. If those brown eyes had belonged to a spaniel they could not have pleaded more eloquently.

'You look awfully washed out—'

'That's only this ghastly lighting. *You* look frightful.'

'Thank you—'

'It isn't every day one sails into Athen· for the first time in one's life!'

'That statement is undeniable.'

'Then I can?'

'On one condition—that you put some warmer clothes on.'

Her face fell. 'If I go back to the cabin I may wake Mummy, and then—'

'Then you'll have to get round her too', said Mr Wharton with grim satisfaction. 'Run along with you, imp.'

She was glad afterwards that he had insisted. The night air was keen. Even in jeans and sweater, with her coat and scarf over them, she was only just warm enough. Her father also reappeared fully clad.

'Have a biscuit', he said. 'And some chocolate.'

'Oh, thanks, Daddy! Isn't it funny how hungry you get if you're

awake? I'm ravenous—worse than breakfast-time in the ordinary way.'

Very slowly the eastern sky began 'o lighten. Small fishing-boats stood out, as though drawn with a few sharp strokes of a pencil. A cluster of islets broke the grey water to starboard.

'Pente Nisia', said a passing sailor.

'"Five Islands"!'" cried Nicola, pleased that she could translate the Greek name. The sailor grinned. He too was pleased that she understood. He held up five fingers.

'Five', he agreed. '*Pente*!'

They were sailing now almost due east, the ship's nose headed into the pink light that was slowly staining air and sea in front of them. 'Rosy-fingered Dawn', Homer used to call it. 'Rosy-fingered Dawn', soon to give place to the sunrise yellow of the crocus. 'Crocus', that was another word Homer was fond of. 'Crocus', and 'wine-dark seas' . . . What a lovely language Greek was, thought Nicola! And how lucky that so much of the colour and the magic was left, even when the words were translated into English. All very well for Daddy to say that nothing could match the original, but very few modern children had the chance to learn Greek. Good translation was a wonderful second-best.

Far to port stretched the craggy outline of the mainland. But the *Angelica* kept well out, for she had to round the island of Salamis. Soon Salamis was visible in the first low rays of the sunrise—Salamis to port and another good-sized island, Aegina, to starboard.

Both names were familiar to Nicola, but Salamis especially. It was at Salamis that the Greek fleet had smashed the Persians, while their king sat helplessly watching from his throne on the mainland.

What a story that was! King Xerxes had brought his host over into Europe to conquer the Greeks. First the Spartans had had their brief hour of glory—they had made their hopeless heroic stand at Thermopylae, trying with their few hundred soldiers to hold the narrow pass against the hordes of Asia. They had died. Like ants the invaders had swarmed southwards. The Athenians had had to evacuate their city, which was burnt and plundered. But instead of fleeing into the Peloponnese, as most of their allies

urged, they had merely crossed the narrow strait to the island of Salamis. The Persian fleet had divided and tried to trap them there, but the Athenians and their allies had manned their war-galleys and struck a crushing blow. That victory had been the turning-point. A year later they had followed it up with a victory on land, and the Persians had been rolled back into their own continent.

'Byron wrote about Salamis', said Mr Wharton, and he quoted softly under his breath:

*'A king sate on the rocky brow  
Which looks o'er sea-born Salamis;  
And ships, by thousands, lay below,  
And men in nations;—all were his!  
He counted them at break of day—  
And when the sun set, where were they?'*

'I like that, Daddy. Isn't it from "The Isles of Greece"?'

'Yes. Byron wrote it when he was very dejected and indignant—the Greek leaders were quarrelling among themselves, and sometimes he felt they weren't worthy of their ancestors. He was afraid they'd never win their independence.'

'What a pity he couldn't have lived a few years longer and seen it happen!'

'Yes, indeed'.

Nicola had read the poem, though she did not know it by heart as her father did. She remembered the first verse:

*'The isles of Greece! the isles of Greece  
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,  
Where grew the arts of war and peace,  
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!  
Eternal summer gilds them yet,  
But all, except their sun, is set.'*

It seemed the right poem to remember as their ship steamed forward between two of the most famous 'isles of Greece', though it was sunrise now, not sunset, and it was a free country they were approaching, not the stagnant, enslaved land which Byron had known.

'When your Greek is better', said Mr Wharton, 'you must read Aeschylus on the battle of Salamis. He was actually there.'

'Aeschylus? He wrote plays, didn't he?'

'Yes. He was the first of the three great writers whose tragedies have come down to us—or at least a few of them, have.'

'Let's see if I know the others—don't tell me!' Nicola knitted her brows. 'Sophocles? And Euripides?'

'That's right. Those are the three. And the story goes that Aeschylus fought in the battle, Sophocles was old enough to sing in the boys' choir that celebrated the victory, and Euripides was born on the day it was fought—his mother was an evacuee on Salamis.'

'How very neat!'

'It might have been arranged', said Mr Wharton dryly, 'especially to help future school-children to get the poets in the right order of age! Still, there's no reason why it shouldn't be true. I feel sure that Aeschylus was in the battle himself. He wrote a play about it, called *The Persians*. It must be one of the first—and finest—eyewitness-accounts in history.' After a moment he added: 'The interesting thing is that the play is given from the Persian point of view—it's all about how the news of the disaster reached Persia and how the people took it. Now *I* think that shows one of the striking features of the Greek mind. They could be extremely patriotic, they could be quite convinced that Greeks were special people, a cut above all "barbarians"—yet instead of just gloating over all the Persians who'd been killed or drowned at Salamis, they could stand back from the whole affair and see it in general human terms. But then, as you know, "sympathy" is a Greek word'.

She nodded. 'Yes. It means "suffering with", doesn't it?'

At this moment Mrs Wharton appeared beside them, with an affectionate morning greeting for both, combined (in Nicola's case) with a shrewd but kindly stare.

'I won't ask you what time you got up, darling—but I *will* ask you to run down and finish packing. You've left things all over the cabin.'

'Yes, Mummy. I hope I can get them all in again—it's an awful squash in the suitcase—'

'If your case is full, you've two extra bags now.'

'Extra bags?'

'Under your eyes. You'll have an early bed tonight; my sweet, if I have to stun you with a milk-bottle and strap you down!'

Nicola grinned apologetically and trotted off to the cabin, not very seriously worried by her mother's threats. By the time she had had a cat-lick and somehow persuaded pyjamas, sponge-bag, and other last-minute items to go into her suitcase, an early breakfast was being served in the saloon. The ship was going on to Crete and was only stopping an hour at Piraeus, the port of Athens.

Hungry though she was, Nicola could hardly wait to swallow the food in front of her. She was continually bobbing up and down in her seat to catch glimpses of the land through the port-hole opposite. By the time she got out on deck again, the *Angelica* was creeping into harbour.

There it was—there it really was, the Parthenon! Just as she had seen it in a dozen pictures—the shattered but still lovely temple with its slender columns, pale golden in the morning sun. It stood on the high, flat-topped crag of the Acropolis, lifted hundreds of feet above the rest of the city. It was like a ship of marble, riding a sea of red-brown roofs and foaming treetops.

For a long time Nicola was content to gaze in silence, as she had gazed at Corfu and at Ithaca. Here was another dream come true. She was seeing the actual temple of the maiden-goddess, Athene. She was seeing Athens, the 'city of the violet crown' as the old poets had called her.

Behind the Parthenon rose the distant purple mountains. More mountains rose serenely to left and right. Mountains whose names were familiar from history and legend—Cithaeron and Parnes and Pentelicon, and Hymettus, so famous for its honey. There was snow sprinkled on their upper slopes.

In the foreground the modern buildings came flowing down to the water's edge. Nicola found it hard to believe that in bygone days Athens and Piraeus had been two towns, separated by several miles of open country, with the Long Walls guarding the road which linked them. Now there seemed no break in the jumble of bricks and mortar. It was one big city.

Her father pointed out the Customs House, a prominent building at the landward end of the big jetty at which they were about

to moor. On either side of it ran the waterfront, where dozens of smaller vessels were tied up in rows—tramp-steamers from all over the Mediterranean and beyond, passenger-steamers serving the islands, caiques, and other craft.

Piræus, said Mr Wharton, was not just the leading port in Greece. It was one of the biggest in all the Mediterranean.

She looked at the bristling masts, like an army of lances—at the great derricks, the chugging motor-launches, the fluttering house-flags, the gulls swooping over the galley-refuse, the uniformed figures like statues on the quay, the men quietly and deliberately busy with mysterious duties. . . . Martin would have loved this. She wished he could have been here to enjoy it, and to explain it to her.

'Bless my soul!' grunted Mr Wharton suddenly.

'What is it, Daddy? What have you seen?'

'Those people down there—look, where the men are getting ready with the gangway. Aren't they the ones who got left behind at Corfu?'

She could not believe her eyes for a moment. Then the boy looked up, saw her, grinned shyly, and waved.

## CHAPTER V

### CITY OF THE VIOLET CROWN

‘AND there’s Dr Lorimer’, said Mrs Wharton, pointing to another obvious Englishman in a blue jacket with glinting buttons, grey flannels, and an old college tie, who was shading his eyes with his hand and searching the line of faces along the rail.

‘Good! He promised to meet us.’

Nicola’s parents were much more interested in the former pupil who had arranged to sub-let his flat to them for the next few months. Dr Lorimer was an archaeologist. What with a holiday that was due to him and then the summer digging season, he would be away from Athens for just the period that the Whartons were there. They were sorry that there would be so little time in which to renew their old acquaintanceship—but very pleased that a furnished flat should drop into their laps so conveniently.

What with all the flurry of getting off the ship with hundreds of other passengers, and being introduced to Dr Lorimer (whom Nicola was too young to remember), she had no chance to do more than exchange a hurried greeting with Martin Murry at the foot of the gangway.

‘How on earth did you get here? You must have *flown*!’

‘We did.’ Martin laughed at her surprised expression. ‘We got here yesterday.’

‘I s’pose you’ve come for your luggage?’

‘Yes. Dad said they’d put it off the ship all right, but we’ve got to see it through the Customs, so we decided to get up early and come down now. I was scared it might go sailing on to Crete if we weren’t here to claim it.’

‘Oh, I’m sure the steward was seeing about it—he was terribly upset you got left behind like that, but of course the ship couldn’t possibly wait. How on earth did you—’

But Nicola’s curiosity was doomed to remain unsatisfied for the time being. They were blocking the gangway. The crowd swept them apart, and they had to go their separate ways.

‘He looks a nice boy’, said Mrs Wharton, as she and Nicola

followed their own luggage along the quay and into the Customs House.

'Quite', answered her daughter casually. Nicola was not committing herself.

'I wonder where he's staying.'

'I hadn't time to—I mean, he hadn't time to tell me.'

It did not take long to clear the Customs and in a few minutes Dr Lorimer was packing them all into a big car borrowed from the institution where he worked.

'Mary thought you might like to come straight up to the flat and have some more breakfast', he said. 'I expect you were all up at a most ungodly hour, and you'll be ready for something more? That'll give you a chance to see the flat, and Mary can put you wise to a few things, Mrs Wharton. We've booked rooms for you at a hotel just for tonight—we don't move out till tomorrow, and anyhow we felt you wouldn't want to start housekeeping the first day. You want a little while to find your feet. But Anna's a treasure—'

'That's the maid, isn't it?' asked Nicola.

'That's right. If in doubt, ask Anna.'

'I'm not going to know myself, with a maid', laughed Mrs Wharton, leaning back with a luxurious gesture. 'They're a thing of the past in England. You can have all your old temples and theatres—*this* is the kind of "ancient remain" I can really appreciate.'

By this time they were clear of the crowded waterfront with its jangling trams and rumbling lorries, and were speeding northwards. Nicola had dropped out of the conversation and was ducking her head first to the right and then to the left, nearly going cross-eyed in her efforts to miss nothing.

An arch—surely arches were Roman, not Greek? A compact cluster of marble columns, rising from a stretch of waste ground—now what did *they* belong to? A fine broad avenue with mansions lining one side and park-railings and trees along the other. . . . A smart green traffic-policeman on a gay blue-and-white platform in the middle of the cross-roads. . . . A palace, looking down on a sunken square with seats and statues and newspaper-kiosks. . . . Shops, banks, offices, hotels—



'Constitution Square', said Dr Lorimer over his shoulder. 'This is the centre of things.'

Nicola liked the look of it. Truth to tell, she had been thinking so much about the ancient ruins and museums she was going to see that she had rather forgotten that Athens was a modern capital as well, with a busy life of its own. She was reminded of it now by the throngs of people hurrying to work, the trams and buses which seemed to be bursting at the seams with their human loads, the bicyclists, the street-vendors setting out their wares, the sweepers with their brooms and hoses, the boys and girls with their school-books. . . .

The car swung round into a long straight shopping thoroughfare, then turned sharply to the right and shot up a narrow side-street. Nicola touched her mother's arm. 'What posh flats!' she whispered softly. Tall blocks rose on either side. They were built in light-coloured stone or sometimes plastered and washed over in attractive pastel shades. There were sun-balconies, bright with spring flowers. The entrances gleamed with glass doors, protected by gracefully curling wrought-iron screens.

Nicola had not dared to hope that their home for the next few months could possibly be in one of these magnificent buildings, and when the car stopped she still imagined, for a few moments, that it was only because of a horse and cart standing a few yards further up the road. When Dr Lorimer jumped out with a cheerful, 'Here we are—don't worry about the luggage for the moment!' she stepped out on to the pavement with a slightly dazed air.

There was just room for the four of them in the lift, which shot them up to the very top floor. In the open doorway stood Mrs Lorimer, smiling but with the somewhat nervous, preoccupied look of a woman about to hand over her home to another. Hovering in the background, black-haired, black-eyed, full of curiosity and fun, was a girl in her early twenties, Anna Sarandopoulou, their maid-to-be.

'Do come in. I'm afraid everything's a bit upset—you know what it's like when you're going away—'

Mrs Lorimer's hand fluttered vaguely towards an up-ended cabin trunk, an open suitcase, and a scattered bunch of tulips just sliding from the tissue paper in which they had been delivered.

'This is Anna, the invaluable Anna, we call her. Will you make the tea now, please, Anna? She understands English quite well, Mrs Wharton, if you don't speak too fast.'

'Thank Heaven for that! What a very nice room!' said Nicola's mother as she walked forward into the living-room, where the table was laid for a full-scale English breakfast. Glass doors stood open to the morning sunshine. Beyond was a balcony, fragrant with blue and pink hyacinths, and above the curly flowerets Nicola saw, as she stepped forward and let out a cry of sheer delight, the pillared shell of the ruined Parthenon silhouetted against the bay, with the island of Salamis across the water.

'Oh, Mummy! Daddy! The view!'

'Do you like it?' said Mrs Lorimer. 'You get the same view from your bedroom.' She smiled at Nicola's blissful expression. 'Come and look. It isn't in quite such a muddle as ours—it hasn't been slept in for several weeks.'

She led the way into a narrow slit of a bedroom and pushed open the french windows. Nicola gasped.

'I've a balcony too—'

'It's all the same balcony.'

'Oh, yes! And you've got chairs on it and everything—'

'Yes, it's like another room really. You'll be glad of it when the summer comes. Every one sits out here.' She turned to draw Nicola's mother into the conversation. 'It's not only an extra sitting-room—it's an extra bedroom if required. We've often put up extra guests on the balcony. It's quite the usual thing out here. We have a camp-bed stowed away and plenty of bedding. Anna knows where everything is.'

'Thank you.' Mrs Wharton laughed a little uncertainly after a peep over the balcony. The pavement looked particularly hard and rather far away. 'I've never minded friends dropping *in*—I shouldn't much care for it if any of them dropped out.'

'Oh, it's perfectly safe.' Dr Lorimer came through the other glass doors from the living-room. 'We've had scores of guests out here, never lost one yet. Breakfast's ready, Mary. And I for one am ravenous.'

They sat down to tea, bacon and eggs, toast and butter and Oxford marmalade, just as if they had been at home. 'Oh, you

can get anything here', said Mrs Lorimer, adding grimly, 'at a price. Though now, of course, the exchange is in our favour. It was dreadful when we first came out, with only 42,000 drachmas to the pound—'

'Only?' Mrs Wharton's eyebrows rose. 'It sounds rather a lot.' 'The noughts didn't mean a thing', Dr Lorimer explained. After the war, the drachma fell and fell. You handed a thousand-drachma note to the newspaper-seller for your copy of *Athens News*—that's the little newspaper they publish in English. That meant you were paying practically sixpence for it. Luckily for us, the rate of exchange was altered, so that we got just twice as many drachmas for our British money. And now they've knocked the last three noughts off everything, and a drachma is really worth something again in itself.'

'By the way,' put in his wife, Anna likes to be paid her wages every month in gold sovereigns. A lot of the servants do.'

If she had said that Anna insisted on Spanish pieces-of-eight, cowrie-shells, or shark's teeth, Mrs Wharton could not have looked more astounded.

'Gold sovereigns?' she echoed. '*English* sovereigns?'

'Yes.'

'But I haven't seen one since I was a little girl! I'm sure Nicola's never seen one in her life!'

'That's soon remedied', said Dr Lorimer. He thrust a finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and fished out a bright coin which he laid on the table-cloth beside Nicola's plate. Turning it over, she saw the head of Queen Victoria on one side and, on the other, St George and the Dragon. It was quite true. She had never seen such a coin in her life. In England they had all been withdrawn by the banks in the early days of the 1914 war, and they had never been re-issued.

'How on earth does one get hold of them?' asked Mrs Wharton.

'Oh, there are plenty in Greece. Fifteen million, they say, though nobody quite knows. You see, most of them are hoarded away in bed-mattresses and shopkeepers' strong-boxes and so on.'

'Bed-mattresses?' broke in Nicola. Her brown eyes were wide with amazement.

Dr Lorimer laughed and explained. During the hundred years

or so of Greek independence, there had been many ups and downs in the national currency, due to revolutions, wars, and other troubles. Country folk, especially, had never quite trusted paper money—they preferred something solid, like gold, which, if anything, went up in value instead of down. In the north of Greece the old French coin, the gold 'napoleon', still circulated widely. Further south, the British sovereign was most popular.

'Peasants like to save up their daughters' dowries in gold', he said, 'and even city people often prefer it for big transactions, like a sale of houses or land. Servants from the country often ask to be paid in sovereigns, as Anna is. And business men who have to travel a lot find it is handy to have a little purse of sovereigns instead of wads and wads of paper drachmas.' He held up the coin before replacing it in his pocket. 'This is a "female". It's a curious thing, but they never feel that a Victorian sovereign is quite so good as one with Edward VII's head or George V's. I suppose it's all part of the old-fashioned Greek attitude to women. Anyhow, it's not done to give anyone too many "female" sovereigns at once.'

'Isn't one in five the accepted rule of the trade?' put in Mr Wharton.

'That's it. The other four should be Edwards or Georges.'

'You seem to know all about this.' Mrs Wharton turned to her husband.

'I met it in the war', he said briefly. 'Supplying the Greek Resistance. Sovereigns poured into Greece then. Even the Germans paid their spies in them.'

'Well, perhaps you can tell me how to get them, to pay Anna at the end of the month?'

'Oh, that's perfectly easy', broke in Mrs Lorimer to reassure her. 'They're on sale—the official exchange rate is given every day in the newspapers along with the weather reports.'

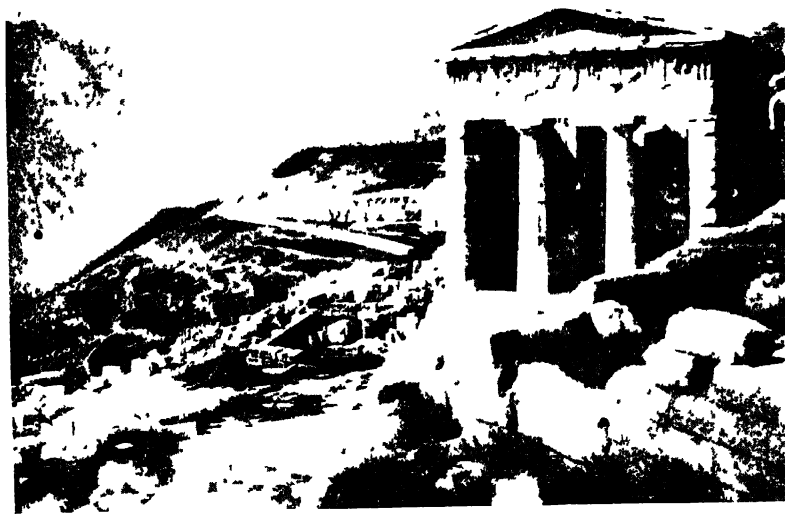
By this time they had finished breakfast. While they had been eating, Anna had tidied the rest of the flat, and the Whartons were taken on a tour of inspection. When they reached the bathroom, Dr Lorimer said with a smile:

'But whether you will always get a bath or not will depend on the state of affairs at Marathon.'



*Easter ceremonies. The lovely spring flowers of Greece play a great part in the festival*





ABOVE: Delphi, once a citadel of shining temples, now a mountainside littered with ruins. BELOW: We have lots of storks' nests, said Andreas



'Marathon?' cried Nicola. 'Where the battle was?'

'Surely *that's* over?' said her mother.

Dr Lorimer laughed. 'I'm talking about the dam. There's a very fine modern reservoir at Marathon now—it's the main water-supply for Athens—but the city has grown so fast in recent years that there's no keeping pace with it. Water gets short, usually, in summer-time, and you'll probably find that it's cut off sometimes, so you'll need to watch the position and keep your jugs and kettles filled. There's no shortage now, of course, after the rain and snow.'

'That's another thing you'll see in the paper', said his wife. 'Every day, between the weather and the price of sovereigns, how many million cubic metres of water there are at Marathon.'

It was arranged that Mr and Mrs Wharton should come round to the flat that evening, to settle further household queries and general arrangements, after Nicola had gone to bed. Meanwhile, as Dr Lorimer and his wife had a busy day before them, he drove them down to their hotel and left them with the light luggage they would need for their one night there.

\* \* \*

'Now we can really explore on our own!' cried Nicola delightfully.

They had spent no more than ten minutes in the hotel. It was a plain, clean, second-class hotel in one of the main streets not far from the University. There was a restaurant on the ground floor but none of the spacious lounges and bars and cloak rooms usual in a London hotel—just an inquiry desk with its dangling keys, half a dozen chairs, two ornamental palms, and a lift.

'We're only expected to sleep here', Mr Wharton explained as the porter unlocked their rooms and bowed them in. 'They'll bring up breakfast to us here—but they wouldn't be offended if we went out even for that. Where we lunch and dine is our own affair, as in most countries.'

When they reached the street again, Nicola looked this way and that, taking in the scene. Now, with the hard pavement under her feet (how hard, she was only to realize after a few hours of exploring the city), she felt really in Athens at last.

Noisy, over-crowded trams ran up and down the middle of the road. Even the platforms were jammed solid with humanity. The

last half-dozen passengers clung precariously to the swaying vehicle, rather like a bunch of living bananas. But no one ever seemed to drop off.

Rows of beautiful American-type cars were parked along the kerb. Her father said they were all taxis. Dr Lorimer had complained that private motorists had great difficulty in parking—or even in stopping for more than a split second—in any of the city's main thoroughfares. But there was one traffic restriction he approved of: hooting was forbidden. As the Greeks loved noise of all kinds, and had always much preferred to use their horn rather than their brakes, this ban had been a great act of self-denial on their part, but one for which every foreign visitor was profoundly grateful.

'Oh, look at him—with his feather-duster!' said Mrs Wharton amusedly.

'That man's got one, too, Mummy.'

Several of the taximen were affectionately flicking their splendid cars with feather-dusters. In the Greek climate, Mr Wharton explained, dust was more often the enemy than mud or rain-spots.

'Let's stroll along to Constitution Square', he suggested, 'it's only the length of this street.'

Every few yards there seemed to be a square newspaper kiosk, festooned with newspapers and magazines in every main language of the west—*Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping*, *Lilliput* and *Woman's Journal*, along with American, French, German, Swiss, Italian, and Turkish publications.

Some of the shops were attractive. There was one big pastry-cook's, full of delicious-looking cakes, chocolates, and Easter eggs. 'Easter is the great time in Greece', said Mr Wharton, 'it's almost like Christmas with us.'

'How lovely! We've come just at the right time, then.'

There were shops full of the usual souvenirs for tourists. Nicola was charmed by some jugs and plates, decorated with antique figures in the style and colouring of the ancient vase-painters. She decided she must take some back to England, but she had several months before her in which to scour the shops for the designs she liked best. It would be rather fun if she could find some scenes from the *Odyssey*, perhaps even a picture of Nausicaa.



There were cafés, with tables and chairs along the pavement as in Paris, but all the people sitting there seemed to be men. On the whole, said her father, Greek cafés were for men. There were, of course, some high-class places where ladies might be seen—especially the smart and sophisticated ones who favoured western ideas of freedom and equality—but a lot of Greek women were slow to throw off the retiring habits they had been brought up with.

‘Why are all the men drinking water?’ asked Nicola.

Every customer had a glass of water beside his cup and saucer.

‘It’s the custom’, her father said. ‘You’ll find the coffee here is very coarse—they make it in the Turkish manner—and you may be quite glad of the water to wash down the grounds! And when it gets on into the summer, you’ll appreciate the cold water for its own sake.’ He laughed. ‘I remember once, before the war, I ordered a pot of tea—and even then they brought a glass of cold water for each one of us as well.’

As they came in sight of the square they passed the large bookshop of Messrs Eleftheroudakis, and Nicola exclaimed at the window-display of English books. There were stacks of Penguins, Pan Books, and other paper-backed series, along with newly-published novels, biographies, travel books, and other types of literature. There were even a few children’s books.

‘Are there so many English people—and Americans—living in Greece?’ she asked.

‘Not really. But educated Greeks are good at languages and they buy a lot of foreign books. It would never pay to translate everything into Greek, you see—the public for books isn’t big enough.’

Nicola saw the force of that. Even here, in the fashionable heart of the capital, many of the passers-by seemed poor and shabby. In the smaller towns and in the mountain-villages money would be even scarcer. And the total population was only just over seven million.

But how *nice* the Greeks looked! She felt at home with them already. She had been prepared for everyone looking very dark and sallow and ‘foreign’. There were some, certainly, of the olive-skinned Mediterranean type and others, bald and hook-nosed, who might have come from still further east; but there was also a large proportion of fresh-complexioned, slenderly-built people

with clear-cut features who recalled to her mind the ideal Greeks of the ancient statues. She liked the decisive way the girls tripped along the (sometimes rather cracked and uneven) pavements on their high heels. The children looked clean and well cared-for. There were no whining beggars and slimy, crawling touts, such as were all too common (she knew) in the tourist centres of some foreign cities. Even the shabbiest street-vendor held up his head and wore, with his shreds and patches, an air of natural self-respect.

It was the same with the waiters in the restaurant where they presently went in search of lunch. They were polite but not servile, human but not familiar.

'I don't want much after those two breakfasts', said Mrs Wharton. 'Perhaps an omelette, do you think?'

They all agreed that an omelette would do very well.

'It's a good job you're not in a carnivorous mood', Mr Wharton remarked. 'There doesn't seem to be any meat on the menu. It's getting very near Easter, you see.'

Lent, he went on to explain, was strictly observed in the Greek Orthodox Church. The fast tended to become more and more severe in the final days before Easter. Not only did people give up eating meat, but they even let their stoves go out. Foreigners, of course, could do as they liked, but except for a few restaurants in the middle of Athens there was not much provision for their needs.

'You see', said Mr Wharton, 'this country is quite solid in its religion. Practically speaking, every Greek is a churchman. There aren't a lot of different sects such as we have at home, and there aren't a lot of anti-clericals—anti-Church people, atheists and so forth—such as you find even in a strong Catholic nation like the French or the Spaniards. Except for those who've travelled abroad I don't think it seriously occurs to the Greek that anyone *wouldn't* want to keep Lent and celebrate Easter, just as he does himself.'

'It must be very comfortable in some ways', sighed Mrs Wharton. 'Everyone agreeing and feeling united.'

'Yes. Of course, the Church is a tremendous unifying force in Greece. It played a big part in the War of Independence and it's always been a patriotic body—some of the priests fought with the

guerrillas against the Nazis. There's nothing in their rules against shedding blood in a just cause.'

'They're allowed to marry, aren't they?' asked Nicola. 'Not like Roman Catholic priests?'

'Yes, they can marry—but if they do, they have to give up any hope of promotion. They don't have married bishops, as we do.'

At this point the omelettes arrived, with a big dish of finely-cut golden chips. Nicola noticed that there were two people waiting on them—an ordinary waiter in a black coat, who took their order, and a good-looking youth in a white jacket who whisked away the unwanted cutlery and brought a jug of water with ice floating in it.

'He's the water-boy', her father murmured. 'Always remember, if you're ever eating out and I'm not with you to pay, it's the waiter who gets the service-charge they put on the bill, and it's usual to leave some small change on the table as well, when you go. That's for the water-boy. Otherwise the poor chap doesn't get anything.'

After the omelette there was no pudding, but the waiter brought a dish of apples and oranges. Nicola took an orange. In Greek it was called a '*portokali*', a nice, musical word which she resolved to memorize for future use. She liked oranges. But the ancients had not had any, so it was not a word she had learnt at school.

After lunch they walked back to the hotel. It was very warm now, and Nicola realized that she was drowsy. Her mother's insistence that she should go and lie down on her bed seemed a better idea than it had done an hour or two ago.

They went up in the lift. She took off her dress and drew back the bedspread. Her mother drew the blinds to cut out the glare, and tiptoed from the room. But she had been unable to cut out the noise, and for some time Nicola lay listening to the squeal and jangle of the trams and the high-pitched, monotonous, almost Oriental cry of a man trying to sell bananas, forty feet below her window. Then at last she slept.

\* \* \*

It was half-past five when she returned to the world of consciousness, to find Mrs Wharton at her bedside with a cup of tea which she had just made on a spirit stove in her own room.

'Even now I was tempted to let you sleep on', she said with a

smile, 'but Daddy thought we'd better have another stroll round before it gets dark.'

'Oh, let's, yes! I feel fine now. I don't want to be *too* wide-awake when it really is bed-time.'

'Don't forget your coat. It'll be cool outside. It's still March, remember, even if it *is* Greece.'

After leaving the hotel they struck up through some of the steep side-streets near the Lorimers' flat.

'I thought we might get a bird's eye view of the city', said Mr Wharton, 'and see the sunset. It's rather late for the Acropolis—they'll be locking the gates by the time we get there. Let's go up Lycabettus instead.'

It was a stiff climb. Lycabettus was a strange, spiky-looking hill which they had seen as a conspicuous landmark in front of them when they had driven up from Piraeus. It was a good deal higher than the Acropolis, altogether almost a thousand feet, but instead of being flat-topped it came to a point, crowned by a little white church. The lowest slopes were built over, then the paths zig-zagged upwards between stunted pine-trees, and towards the end of the climb they were on the open hillside, bathed in the red-gold light of the sinking sun.

'Curious thing', panted Mr Wharton, attempting with long deliberate strides to keep pace with Nicola's impatient trot-and-scramble, 'but this hill is scarcely mentioned in classical literature—you'd hardly know it existed, though it's as much a part of Athens as Nelson's Column is of London. I don't think the Athenians really *like* Lycabettus—'

'The courting couples seem to', commented Mrs Wharton.

That was obvious. Two seemed to be the regulation number for parties enjoying the sunset. Most of them seemed quite satisfied to leave the climb unfinished, and there were very few people on the actual summit when the Whartons arrived there.

Part of the narrow space was occupied by the church of St George, and beside it was a little encampment with half a dozen khaki-clad soldiers, a reminder that Lycabettus was an important look-out post, which played a vital part in times of civil war. In front of the church was a terrace with a low parapet, shaded by a gnarled old tree from a branch of which dangled a bell.

All Athens lay stretched at their feet, with the Parthenon catching the last rays of the sun, and the Bay of Salamis beyond, dotted with anchored ships, and the sea stretching out, like molten gold, to the darkly-etched outline of Aegina.

In the foreground, his chin on his hands, his elbows on the parapet, a boy sagged pensively over one of the world's finest panoramas. He spun round startled as Mr Wharton's immense paw fell gently upon his shoulder.

'Oh! Oh—hullo!'

'On your own?' Mr Wharton's slow West Country burr was soothing. Martin smiled.

'Yes. I came out for a walk. Dad had to see a man. He's picking me up for dinner at the hotel. But he said he wouldn't be free till eight.'

'Your father must be terribly busy', said Mrs Wharton. 'I suppose journalism is always hectic, and he's taking up a new job, isn't he? But it must be lonely for you.'

'Oh, no. I—I don't mind it.'

'Isn't it super, here?' said Nicola enthusiastically. Her eyes swept the horizon. 'Look at the mountains everywhere. You can understand why they called it "the city of the violet crown".'

'Is that what they call Athens?'

'Yes', said Mr Wharton. 'The poets called Athens that.' He quoted:

*'Great Athens, shining town  
Of song, with violet crown . . .'*

'I wish I knew what everything was', said Martin. 'Of course I know the Acropolis—'

'Have you been up there?' Nicola demanded.

'Not yet. Dad's busy, you see, and—'

'We're going up there tomorrow morning', broke in Mrs Wharton surprisingly. At least, both Nicola and her father were surprised. The idea had only been mentioned once, and Mrs Wharton had squashed it firmly, saying that they would be fully occupied unpacking and settling into the flat. Nicola stared at her but managed, for once, to check her natural tendency to demand an explanation. Her mother continued, without turning a hair:

'Would you like to come with us, if your father isn't free, that is?'

'Well—if you're sure I wouldn't be in your way—'

'Of course you wouldn't! Tell us the name of your hotel and we'll call for you after breakfast. But if your father has other plans for you, it won't matter in the slightest. Just leave us a message.'

'Oh, no, I'm sure it will be all right', said Martin with more warmth than he had previously shown.

'They stayed for a few minutes on the summit, Mr Wharton naming the different landmarks—the Royal Palace and the Parliament building, the Arcopagus hill on which St Paul preached his famous sermon about 'the Unknown God', the temple of Zeus, the stadium. . . . Then, as the colour was draining out of the sky and the breeze was freshening, they started down, Martin and Nicola skipping ahead and chattering like a brace of magpies.

Below, in the gathering dusk, the city put on its necklaces of glittering lights.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOME OF THE GODDESS

MR MURRY looked pleased when Martin told him that he had been asked to spend the morning with the Whartons.

‘Fine!’ he said. ‘I was wondering how you’d be able to amuse yourself. Here—’ He pulled out his wallet and gave his son some money ‘Mind you pay your whack. May be entrance-fecs and ice-creams and so forth.’

‘I’ll try to pay for myself’, Martin promised earnestly. ‘Sometimes it’s a bit awkward with grown-ups.’

‘Well, do your best, old chap. You can often pass it off with some joke about the currency allowance. British people abroad have to watch their expenses nowadays—it’s a convenient excuse for not letting them treat you too much.’ He grinned at Martin’s solemn expression. ‘Don’t worry unduly. The heavens won’t fall if they won’t let you pay for your ’bus ticket, once in a while. And usually you can find a way to get square—buy the girl a Coca-Cola or something.’

‘Do they have Coca-Colas in Athens?’

‘You bet they do. It’s one of the signs of American civilization.’

Mr Murry departed to his office. Martin sat down in the entrance-hall of their hotel, turning the pages of an English picture-magazine which he had just bought from a kiosk in the street outside. Ten minutes later the Whartons arrived, full of apologies for their lateness. They had been moving into their flat, but they had now left Anna to carry on as usual, and she would be expecting Martin at lunch, if he was free to go back with them.

‘But I do hope you haven’t been waiting long?’ said Mrs Wharton.

‘Oh, no, really—I’ve been quite all right. I had my book—’

Martin was suddenly conscious of an awkward pause in the stream of friendly greetings. His three new friends were staring, with one accord, at the glossy magazine he was rolling and unrolling in his hands.

‘Oh, your magazine, you mean’, said Nicola with an obvious effort, and, as though a green light had shone, the conversation rolled forward again.

Later, when he knew them all a good deal better, Martin learnt that one of the most terrible crimes among the Whartons and their circle was to say 'book' when you meant 'magazine'. Luckily, by the time he realized the enormity of his mistake, he had had a chance to win their respect and liking in other, more important, ways. And he, in turn, had had time to know them better and to learn that they were not stuck-up high-brow snobs—it was just that they loved real books so sincerely that they hated to hear the honoured name given to something which (except that it was printed too) was utterly different.

A few minutes' walking took them right out of the smart shopping streets which branched off from Constitution Square, and into the steep maze of winding lanes which covered the northern slopes of the Acropolis hill. This was the Plaka, the old Turkish part of the city, with picturesque, shabby little houses which might have been a thousand miles and a hundred years distant from the modern quarter they had just left. It was almost like stepping from a fragment of Paris into some Balkan mountain-village. Hens were scratching on scraps of waste ground and tiny children ran out to stare, as though strangers seldom passed their door.

'In one sense,' said Mr Wharton, as they paused to get their breath and gaze down over the city, spreading inland to the brown and mauve hills, 'present-day Athens is only an overgrown village. When the Turks were driven out, the population had sunk to a few thousand—in fact there was a lot of hesitation before the Greeks decided to make Athens their new capital.'

'It's grown since then,' said Nicola, surveying the sea of roofs.

'Well, it's more than a hundred years since then, of course. But the main expansion came in the nineteen-twenties when all the refugees came over.'

'What refugees were they?'

'From Smyrna, mainly, and the Turkish coast of Asia Minor generally. That was just after the first World War and after Turkey had had her revolution and become a modern republic. She and Greece had a deplorable little war of their own—I can't go into the rights and wrongs of it—but there were some frightful massacres, and the Greek refugees came streaming across the Aegean.'



A big proportion of them had to be settled in Athens and Piraeus, so the population leapt up again.'

'What were they doing in Asia Minor in the first place?' Martin asked.

'They'd always lived there. Ancient Greece wasn't one country with hard-and-fast boundaries. Greeks lived all along the coastal fringe of what is Turkey now—in fact, they were dotted round almost all the coasts of the Mediterranean. Marseilles, Naples, Alexandria, were all founded by Greeks. They were all round the Black Sea, too, in what is now the Soviet Union. In most places, of course, they'd got thoroughly mixed up with other races, though I believe you can still trace the genuine Greek nose in the South of France and some parts of the Crimea! But in Asia Minor, Turkey-in-Asia as we used to call it at school, when there was still a lot of Turkey-in-Europe, the Greeks really were still Greeks.'

'I remember, now', said Martin, 'when we flew from Corfu, there was a rather nice man named Zancarol. He mentioned those refugees.'

'They were a very big problem at the time, for a poor country like Greece to cope with. And they had another refugee-problem after the last war, though then it wasn't Greeks coming in from outside, it was resettling all the people who'd lost their homes under the Nazi occupation and in the guerrilla fighting afterwards.'

'Mr Zancarol said there were Greeks scattered all over the world', Martin recalled. 'He said it was even an ancient Greek who discovered Britain—surely he was pulling my leg then?'

'Oh, no. He meant Pytheas. He was a Greek sea-captain from Marseilles. He went to Britain just after the time of Alexander the Great—and long, long before Julius Caesar and the Romans.'

'How interesting!' said Mrs Wharton. 'I never knew that.'

Martin was very glad that Mrs Wharton was with them. Mr Wharton—well, he was a University lecturer and terribly clever and naturally *he* knew everything. Nicola was crazy about Greece and seemed thoroughly at home with all the weird names that dripped from her father's lips. But Mrs Wharton seemed to know very little more than Martin himself, and she was not ashamed to admit it. Martin found that comforting.

They had now come round the shoulder of the hill and were just beneath the entrance to the Acropolis. A broad staircase, chipped and broken by twenty-five centuries of wear, war, and weather, mounted steeply in front of them between scarred walls and shattered columns.

'Let me get this straight', demanded Mrs Wharton firmly, as her husband paused to fumble for the entrance-money. 'What is the Acropolis and what is the Parthenon? Are they the same thing? People are always talking about them and I get mixed. Unmix me.'

'Certainly, darling.' He bought the tickets and they filed through the ancient entrance. 'The Acropolis is the whole set-out—the hill and all the different buildings which stood here. The word means the "high city". It's the original core of Athens. The rest grew round it, just as lots of English towns grew round some hill with a castle on it.'

'Was this a castle, then?'

'It could have been treated as one if need be—it often was in later ages, but not actually in classical times. Then it was more of a holy place, like the Temple at Jerusalem.' Mr Wharton pointed in front to the main building, which was already familiar to them as a distant landmark. '*This* is the Parthenon.'

Now, at closer quarters, they saw a row of eight graceful fluted columns, rising from a base of steps to support the very shallow, almost flattened triangle of the gable-end, the proper name for which, in Greek architecture, was the 'pediment'. Behind, striped with slanting shadows, was an inner row of similar marble pillars. Longer rows stretched back, to right and left, forming the sides of the building. As the little party mounted the steps and entered the roofless interior, they caught lovely glimpses of the distant sea and mountains, cut into tall panels and framed by each pair of neighbouring columns.

'And what was the Parthenon?' asked Mrs Wharton, to Martin's secret relief.

'It was the chief temple, built for the statue of Athene, the patron-goddess of the city. "Parthenos" meant "maiden"—she was the grey-eyed maiden, beautiful but also intellectual. Whereas Artemis was all for sport and Aphrodite was chiefly interested in

the opposite sex. Mount Olympus offered a pretty varied cross-section', added Mr Wharton with a chuckle. 'Most of the same types I have among my women-students—except for the "intellectual-but-plain". The Greeks could never have imagined a plain goddess! They worshipped beauty above everything.'

The Parthenon was still beautiful, though it was only a ruined shell. It was wonderful that even so much remained. There would have been much more, but in the seventeenth century the Turks (who cared nothing for classical Greek remains) used the place as a gunpowder store. During the siege of Athens by the Venetians a stray shot exploded the gunpowder, and the temple was blown outwards in all directions. Early in the nineteenth century, again, most of the sculptured slabs still lying about had been bought by a Scotsman, Lord Elgin—the famous 'Elgin Marbles' which were still to be seen in the British Museum.

'I remember', cried Mrs Wharton. 'You took me to see them when we were engaged. Though I can't say I have more than a very hazy memory of them.'

They spent an hour or two on the Acropolis, visiting the remains of the other buildings. They saw the Erechtheum, with its unusual portico, the pillars of which were carved in the likeness of girls, and called 'caryatids', supporting the roof of the porch on their heads just as living girls might have carried their water-jars to the fountain. The Erechtheum was so called because it had once contained the shrine of Erechtheus, an early king of Athens in the misty age of legend.

'He was the one who had to judge between Athene and Poseidon the sea-god', explained Mr Wharton. 'They both wanted to be chosen as the special deity of the Athenians. Poseidon offered them *his* special present—he struck the rock with his trident and a salt-water spring burst forth. But Athene struck the rock with her spear, and an olive-tree sprang up, and very sensibly Erechtheus decided that was more useful. And there,' concluded Mr Wharton dryly, indicating an olive-tree which came struggling out of the earth beside the south wall, 'is the sacred olive-tree of Athene—or at any rate its direct descendant.'

'What about the salt-water spring?' asked Martin with a sceptical grin.

'Doesn't seem to be here now—but the ancient records did speak of its being actually inside the building, in a sort of well. Being tactful people, the Athenians in later years combined three holy shrines in this one building, one for Athene, one for Poseidon, and one for Erechtheus himself. They used to point out the actual marks of the sea-god's trident, but you can't see *them* now, I'm afraid. The building's gone through a few changes since then. It was a Christian church, then it was the harem for the wives of the Turkish governor—and it's also had its fair share of bombardment, earthquake damage, and other wear and tear.'

Pagan temple, Christian church, Turkish harem—or, in the case of the Parthenon, Turkish mosque. . . . The story of these ruins, he explained, symbolized the three chapters of Greek history down to the modern rebirth of Greece as a free nation.

Chapter One was 'classical Greece', continuing into the age of the Roman Empire, of which Greece eventually became a province. This lasted until the Emperor Constantine became a Christian and his subjects adopted the new faith.

This first long chapter was the only one about which English people knew much. It included the wars of the Greeks and Persians, the Athenians and Spartans, the great authors and architects and sculptors and philosophers—and, later, St Paul preaching to a pagan audience on that other hill, the Arcopagus, facing the entrance to the Acropolis.

Chapter Two, went on Mr Wharton, might be called the Byzantine Age, and it was most important if they were going to understand many of the things they saw while they were in Greece. It was called after Byzantium (now Istambul), which became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire when the dominions of the Caesars became too unwieldy to govern as one unit. Greece had formed part of the eastern half, and Greek had been the official language all through that half. There had been many results of this division, one of the most important being the first great separation of the Christian Church into the 'Latins', now 'Roman Catholics', and the Greek Orthodox Church centred in Byzantium, otherwise known as Constantinople, the 'city of Constantine'.

'This chapter is full of interesting history, actually', he told

them, 'but unfortunately very few English people ever make time to study it. But many more people get enthusiastic about the *art* of the Byzantine period, and you'll see a lot of that while we're here.'

'What sort of art?' asked Nicola.

'Church art, mostly. You'll find the churches are quite different from the Gothic ones you've seen in England. The carvings and wall-paintings—the "icons", as they're called, which means any sort of picture or image of a sacred person—and the very elaborate candlesticks, vessels for the altar, embroidered vestments for the priests—'

'I saw a shop-window full of them', said Martin.

'Well, all that is Byzantine. It comes straight down from the eastern branch of the Roman Empire.'

The classical and the Christian, he said, were the two interwoven strands in modern Greece, and they must try to understand the different things which each had given to the national character.

Classical Greece had been based on reason and free discussion: it had led to the first democracy in the world.

Christian Greece—Christian, that is, in the Byzantine tradition—had been based on simple faith and unquestioning obedience to the authority set over the people. The effects of this could still be seen in the tremendous power of the bishops and priests over the rest of the population.

The second, or Byzantine, chapter of Greek history had lasted until the fall of Constantinople to the Turk; in—

'In A.D. 1453!' chipped in Nicola. 'I do remember that, anyhow. Miss Atholl said it was one of the great dates in European history.'

The third chapter had been uneventful. For nearly four centuries—right down to the time of Lord Byron—Greece had been a province of the Turkish Empire, governed (or more often misgoverned) by pashas with bodyguards of brutal soldiers, who from time to time carried out savage raids upon the peasantry. The Greeks had never lost their religion or their patriotic feelings, but they had been helpless against their Moslem rulers. The country had stagnated, slipping down and down into the poverty and backwardness from which it had only begun to rise again in modern days.

'Sorry about the long lecture', said Mr Wharton, realizing that he had been holding forth non-stop for about ten minutes. 'But it may help you to understand what you see.'

'It's jolly interesting', said Martin warmly. He meant it. He did not like not knowing about things. And it had made him feel better to know that Nicola and her mother needed this explanation quite as much as he did himself.

Three chapters—classical, Byzantine, Turkish—and everything (except the really modern) fitted into one or the other. Even he could remember that.

He looked out over the city with new eyes. He was beginning to see the wood despite the trees.

\* \* \*

Mr Wharton said it was a mistake to try to swallow the Acropolis in one gulp—one should come back several times at least and explore different parts at leisure.

So, that morning, they only glanced quickly at some of the ruins—at the Propylaea, for instance, with its series of vestibules and doorways and its broad sweep of steps, superb even in decay, which had formed the ceremonial entrance to the whole citadel; and at the elegant little shrine of the Wingless Victory standing just outside it, which had once been demolished by the Turks and later re-erected, stone by stone, by archaeologists.

What a difference it made, thought Martin, being with someone who knew all about it!

If he had come up here by himself he would have enjoyed the view, marvelled at the size of the marble blocks, but missed the meaning of it all. He would have come away feeling that he had 'done' the Acropolis and that it was, after all, only a famous heap of ruins.

Mr Wharton had the gift of making the place live again before their eyes. Dimly—because he was still a bit hazy about the clothes those bygone people would have worn—Martin saw the great processions climbing the steps of the Propylaea, the priests, the statesmen and generals, the boys, the girls, the beasts chosen for sacrifice. He saw, in his mind's eye, the colossal bronze statue of Athene, fifty or sixty feet high, which had once risen from a corner of the ramparts—homeward-bound Athenian sailors had watched



ABOVE: Olympus itself, where Zeus and Hera had once sat up in their cloud-wreathed thrones. BELOW: Seen the temple plunged into a narrow defile—the no less famous Valley of the Cup.





*Poverty and Greece are sisters. ABOVE: Peasant women cut the tiny corn-harvest with sickles, and BELOW one of them carries it home on her donkey.*





for the flash of the sun on her helmet and spear-tip while they were still miles out at sea, rounding Cape Sunium. Mr Wharton's quiet, slow, yet enthusiastic voice put roofs on the shrines, paint and bronze on the pale, time-scarred marble, and people—famous and unknown people—everywhere.

Pericles, the great statesman, who had inspired all this building in the most glorious period of Athens in the half-century following the Persian defeat . . . Phidias, the sculptor, and all the other artists and architects and craftsmen who had carried out the work, the forgotten slaves who had hauled at these stones when they were new. . . . Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Euripides, Aristophanes, Xenophon, and a host of others, philosophers, poets, playwrights, historians, who must have strolled here when the airy, shady colonnades were still whole and unbroken.

Martin came down from the Acropolis with a private determination to find out more about them all.

## CHAPTER VII

### ‘HAPPY EASTER!’

THEY were back at the Whartons’ flat in good time for lunch.

Martin felt a pang of envy when he saw the place, not only because it was a beautiful flat in itself but even more because it was a home. If only his father would find somewhere half as nice as this—and a Greek housekeeper (though there could hardly be another ‘invaluable Anna’ in the world) who would at least cook for them and stitch on the occasional button! Hotels and restaurants were all right for a time, but there was nothing cosy about them. He made his second resolution that day: he would pick his moment and then tackle his father with the idea.

When Anna had washed up the lunch dishes, she asked Mrs Wharton rather shyly if she might now prepare the *koulourakia*. ‘The what, Anna?’

The maid hesitated, groping for words. ‘They are for Easter. Everyone has *koulourakia* for Easter. They are like this—round.’ She sketched a roughly curved shape in the air with her finger, and Mrs Wharton, jumping to conclusions, said:

‘Oh, eggs!’

Anna’s cheerful face creased with laughter. ‘No, no, *kyria*! On Thursday, eggs. Today, *koulourakia*.’

‘Is it something to eat?’ asked Nicola.

‘Yes. At Easter everyone eats them.’

‘Then I vote we ask her to go ahead’, said Nicola decidedly. By this time Mr Wharton had gone out, so he was not there to interpret.

Suddenly Anna dived back into the kitchen, to reappear a few moments later tapping a biscuit-tin. ‘Like this, *kyria*. I make, yes?’

‘Oh, please do, Anna.’

‘Thank you, *kyria*!’ She turned in the doorway and smiled at Nicola. ‘You like to watch?’

‘I’d love to.’

Nicola followed her back into the kitchen, and Martin, after a moment’s hesitation, decided that the invitation included him.

Mrs Wharton had just announced her intention of putting her feet up and writing a few of the more urgent post-cards to friends at home.

The young people had an uproarious afternoon in the kitchen with Anna—who was very far from being an old person herself, and who had a tremendous sense of fun, blended with a genius for mime whenever English words failed her.

The mysterious *koulourakia* turned out, in the end, to be a kind of shortbread, cut into round pieces. Anna baked them in the oven, but many Greek people, she explained, took them round on trays to their local baker. Martin said he had once spent Christmas with an aunt in the depths of the country, and there too, he remembered, some of the cottagers had taken their Christmas dinner to the village bakehouse, because their own ovens would not hold enough.

*Koulourakia* could be made any time in the week before Good Friday, but Anna would not be dyeing the eggs until the Thursday. Eggs should be red. That was the proper colour. Some people dyed them green or blue for a change—Nicola could have what colour she liked, being a foreigner—but red was correct, whatever some people said (Greeks, too!) who ought to know better.

'Please, I'd like red', said Nicola meekly, but with a wink at Martin. 'What about you, Martin.'

'I—I shan't be here.'

'No, but I can bring it you. I'm sure Anna will do one for you—won't you, Anna? Otherwise, living in a hotel, you'll probably have to buy an ordinary Easter egg from a shop.'

Anna willingly promised. Would they like a pattern on their eggs?

'Oh, please!'

'How do you make a pattern Anna?'

It seemed that she tied leaves round the egg before they went into the dye, so that parts of the shell were left in their natural white or brown.

She told them a good deal about the Greek Easter as she bustled about her task. On the Sunday before—

'Palm Sunday', interjected Nicola quickly.

Well, on the Sunday before, everyone went to church and

brought home a tiny cross, handed out by the priest to each member of the congregation. Anna pointed proudly to her own cross, made from two bits of palm. It lay, with a sprig of flowers in front of her own private *icon*, a small coloured picture of the Virgin Mary, which hung on the wall of the kitchen. It would lie there until next year.

On Wednesday, she would go to church again and the priest would anoint her with oil—she dropped her voice reverently, and her gestures became restrained and solemn—and he would make the sign of the cross on her forehead and her chin and on each cheek. He would do this to each worshipper—and in every crowded church, throughout Greece, in every lonely mountain-village and tiny island, it would be the same. That evening there would be beautiful singing. Anna's dark eyes shone. They should hear the singing. Nowhere in the world was there church singing like the Greek!

The strange thing was (though neither Nicola nor Martin tried to explain it to her) that they had already *had* one Easter in England before they left home. The Orthodox Church had a different system for calculating the festival from the one used by the West. As a result, Mr Wharton had previously explained to them, the Greek Easter was sometimes a week or two ahead, sometimes a week or two behind. Only once in a while, depending on the moon, did the dates happen to agree.

After a little while the talk turned to other things. Anna was clearly interested in her new employers and in their young guest. As her deft fingers flitted about their work, her tongue was equally busy, firing off questions and exclaiming at the answers. Evidently there was no rule in Greece against asking personal questions. All Anna's questions were extremely personal, but they were put in such a frank and friendly way that somehow they never seemed rude.

'I was a bit shattered by some of them', Martin admitted afterwards with a laugh, when they had rejoined Nicola's parents over a cup of tea. 'She wanted to know how much my father earned, whether my mother was dead or divorced—'

'You coped with her jolly well', said Nicola. 'I didn't know where to look. But you didn't turn a hair.'

'Oh, I didn't mind really. I like her. And she gets on with the job, even if she does jabber.'

'Mrs Lorimer said she was a good worker', said Mrs Wharton.

'Most Greeks are, if you treat them properly', chimed in her husband. 'The point is, however poor they are, they have a lot of self-respect. They really *are* a democratic nation. Although they have a King and Queen, there's no nobility. Actually, there are some "Counts" in Corfu, but their titles go back to the old Venetian Republic, and they don't mean much now. Of course, you have rich Greeks and poor Greeks, but most of the fortunes have been made quite recently. There isn't much class-distinction.'

'I liked the way Anna talked to us', said Nicola. 'It was sort of natural. Not really rude or familiar. I felt sure she didn't *mean* to be nosy.'

'She didn't', Mr Wharton assured her. 'The Greeks have a well developed bump of curiosity—and unlike us, they don't think it's bad-mannered to ask personal questions. In fact, it's a sign that they like you, or they wouldn't be interested enough to bother. You know, our word "idiot" is Greek originally, and means someone who minds his own business and ignores other people's—which may be a British ideal but certainly isn't theirs.'

'Anna's no idiot, then', chuckled Mrs Wharton. 'I've only spent a little time with her, but I'm quite sure she'll soon have the story of my life out of me.'

'You'll get hers in exchange', her husband promised her. 'It's a two-way traffic. She'll tell you her family-history, her hopes and fears, with a complete record of births, marriages, and deaths—and she'll expect ours.'

'Oh, dear —'

'Don't worry. Start with the story of your appendix. That should prove a big success.'

'I'll run it as a serial for the first week, then', she agreed good-humouredly.

'Yes, but don't use it just to keep her at bay—don't let her feel you resent her curiosity about other things, like how much you've paid for a dress and what sort of a house we have at home and so forth. If you want to get the best work out of a Greek you must make friends with him. They do like a personal relationship. If

you're stand-offish, they'll do what you tell them to do but they won't have their hearts in the job in the same way.'

\* \* \*

It took Martin a little while to adjust himself to the Whartons. In some ways they were so different from any of the people he had known before.

Nicola still put him off at times. She knew a bit too much, she was so bright and confident and enthusiastic. And her father's dry, sly humour could be disturbing—Martin would look at that sober face and listen to that deliberate West Country drawl and wonder just how to take him. At first he thought he was being got at; he had occasional moments of painful embarrassment, but they became rarer as he came to realize that Mr Wharton did not intend them. It was partly, he found, that Mr Wharton was more used to College students than children and that, as he never believed in talking down to them, he had a way of politely pretending that they knew as much as he did himself. To Martin this merely brought home, more acutely than ever, his own ignorance.

Mrs Wharton never made him feel uncomfortable. Often her own blunt demands that her husband should explain something were Martin's salvation. By degrees, as he came to know her, he realized that under her northern crispness, and for all her impatience with the conventional frills of polite society, she had the truest form of tact, the most genuine kind of consideration for other people.

Mrs Wharton, he once assured his father with considerable warmth, was 'all right'.

He spent a good deal of time with the family that week, for his father was working long hours, picking up the innumerable threads of his new job.

'Look,' he told Martin, 'there's always a big procession on Good Friday evening, they tell me—'

'Yes, Dad, the Epitaphios.'

He could not help feeling a tiny thrill of satisfaction as he saw his father's eyebrows go up. Mr Wharton had mentioned the ceremony.

'Well, it sounds as though it's worth seeing, by all accounts. And the place to see it is Constitution Square. Now, the thing is,

I can get some extra places on one of the office-balconies—do you think your young girl-friend and her parents would like to come along with us?’

‘She’s *not* my girl-friend—not like that’, Martin protested. ‘But I’d love to ask them. Thanks a lot, Dad. They’ve been jolly decent to me.’

‘Let me know tonight, then. There’s a good deal of competition for places.’

The Whartons accepted the offer very gratefully. Mr Wharton had been offered places at a window in one of the streets through which the procession passed, but no view-point could equal a balcony over the square. They would see the long column pass beneath them and then wind all the way round the big open space.

If they were going to understand and appreciate the solemn ritual of a Greek Easter, said Mr Wharton, it was high time they had a look at some of the churches. So, on the Thursday, they gave classical Athens a rest and went off on what he called ‘a little Byzantine excursion’.

First they headed for the cathedral, which was about five minutes’ walk from Constitution Square. It stood in a much smaller open space of its own, with trams clattering along one side, and a constant stream of other traffic eddying round it. Most of the Athenian squares were quite small and homely. There were none of those great deserts of bare pavement favoured by some countries, broken only by pompous statues or florid fountains and planned as settings to vast public buildings. Indeed, Constitution Square was the only one laid out with any notion of dignity—one side, on higher ground, was filled by the Parliament building which had formerly been the royal palace, and the memorial to the Greek Unknown Soldier was in front of it—but the Athenians had humanized even Constitution Square and taken all the stiffness out of it, with gay café tables and kiosks, park-seats and greenery. The very statues had a charm of their own. Martin and Nicola especially liked one of a fawn.

There were no such embellishments round the cathedral. It was merely that the narrow streets widened a little—bulged, so to speak, to allow room for its bulk—and that there were rather more street-vendors than usual in the neighbourhood. Besides the usual cakes, fruit, and other oddments, there were candles on sale,

sacred pictures and images, and fireworks to be let off during the Sunday morning celebrations.

The cathedral itself was rather a disappointment to the children, whose ideas of a cathedral were all bound up with the mediaeval spires and towers, tracery and flying buttresses, which they were used to seeing on the great Gothic churches of the West. The Byzantine style was quite different. Instead of spires and towers there were squat domes like upturned saucers, resting on high massive walls, devoid of statuary and pierced only with small round-arched windows. The effect was rather plain.

This cathedral was only a hundred years old. 'Architecturally', said Mr Wharton, 'it is a mess. Four different men had a hand in designing it—and they hadn't much idea of co-operation. It was built with the materials of seventy older churches that had been demolished—'

'Seventy!' cried the children together.

Mr Wharton smiled. 'Seventy. As you see, it's a pretty big building. It just goes to show that size isn't everything!'

This truth was still further demonstrated by a tiny church which stood beside the cathedral, rather (as Martin suggested) like a baby-elephant with its mother. This was the old cathedral, sometimes known as the 'Little Metropolis', to distinguish it from the new building which had superseded it.

Little it certainly was. The outside measurements were only forty feet by twenty-five. It was built entirely of Pentelic marble, which had darkened with time to a brownish-yellow, and was roofed with pink tiles. It was very Eastern in appearance, with tiny window-slits rounded at the top, and a squat domed tower in the middle, surmounted by a cross.

'How old is it?' asked Mrs Wharton.

'I don't think any one knows for certain. Some put it as early as the tenth century, others as late as the twelve-hundreds. It isn't so easy to date these Byzantine churches. They weren't all the time developing new styles as Gothic was in the West. That was rather the essence of Byzantine civilization altogether—to stand still. The Byzantine Greeks stood still for the best part of a thousand years, in politics, religion, and everything else—until the Turks came along and pushed them over.'



They followed him round the corner of the building. At the base of the south wall lay a block of greyish marble about seven feet long. He ran his finger along it, indicating a faint inscription.

'What does it say, Daddy?'

*'This is the stone from Cana where our Saviour, Jesus Christ, turned water into wine.'*

For a moment nobody said anything. Then Nicola asked in an awed voice: 'Is it really, Daddy?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Who can be sure?' He pointed to some still fainter scratches. 'You can't read this name now, it's too worn, but they say it was the name of a pilgrim who cut his name on it when he went to Cana—fourteen hundred years ago. That's when the stone is said to have been brought from the East. It certainly isn't local. It came to Athens from Elateia—and that's a good many miles away. Before that, who knows?'

'I hope it's true', said Nicola softly. And she touched the ancient marble very gently with her fingers.

\* \* \*

After leaving the two cathedrals, the tiny old one and its great modern successor, they caught a bus to Daphni, where, Mr Wharton explained, they would see a finer Byzantine church than any of those in Athens itself.

'In fact,' he said, 'Daphni is reckoned one of the gems of Christian architecture in any style.'

'How long does it take to get there, Daddy?'

'About half an hour, I believe. But there aren't buses back every five minutes as there might be in England, so I thought we'd better take our picnic lunch.'

Anna had been only too glad to pack them up a basket. She did not like cooking on the day before Good Friday. And they would not get any hot food elsewhere, except possibly in the very centre of Athens. Out in the country, cold beans and cold fish would be the best they could hope for. All the taverns would have let their stoves go out by now.

The bus drove out through the western suburbs along the road to Eleusis, or Elefsis as the modern Greeks called it. In ancient days, it seemed, the place had been famous for 'the Eleusinian mysteries'. These (rather to Martin's disappointment) had been

nothing to do with crime. 'Mysteries' had meant sacred rites, so sacred that they were also secret, and only those initiated had been allowed to see them. Athenian worshippers had gone to Eleusis every year as pilgrims, and the road along which the bus was now bumping and racketing was the old Sacred Way.

'I wish we could see Eleusis', said Nicola.

'You'll be disappointed when you do', Mr Wharton assured her. 'There's an armament factory and two cement-works—it's one of the very very few corners of all Greece that have been uglified by modern industry.'

'What a shame!'

'You're sure to pass through it some day, going to Corinth or Delphi. It'll keep till then.'

It was sad to realize that in Greece, as in other countries, progress and development had brought ugliness. There was nothing sacred about the one-time Sacred Way. Where once the sandalled pilgrims had trudged along in bright, flowing robes there was now a constant traffic of carts and lorries, bicycles and cars and laden donkeys. The ramshackle suburbs of modern Athens ran far out, past the olive-grove where once Plato had taught his pupils in the world's original Academy. But, if there was a good deal of poverty here and shabbiness, it was still very different from a slum. The people looked alert and cheerful, the children well cared for, and even the poorest little homes had a touch of defiant gaiety, if it was only a lick of new paint or colour-wash or a home-made window-box bright with the hues of spring. The blue sky overhead, too, and the clear Greek atmosphere—clear, that is, except for the dust stirred up by the traffic in front—gave the scene touches of beauty it would have lacked in a drabber climate.

'Greeks', said Mr Wharton, 'are experts at making the best of things.'

After about twenty minutes the bus began to climb between two hills. The last suburbs fell behind and, for the first time since Corfu, they found themselves in the Greek countryside. Pinewoods clothed the slopes. There was a good deal of market-gardening on this side of Athens, too, but even now, in spring-time, it looked a much drier landscape than that of the luxuriant Ionian Islands. That was quite a fair impression, as it proved.

This part of Greece, Attica, was one of the driest in the whole country, whereas the islands of the west coast had the biggest rainfall of all.

Soon after they had crossed what was really the summit of a low pass, the bus drew up in front of the monastery and they got out.

'Oh, this is lovely!' Mrs Wharton exclaimed.

As so often in England the monastery had been reduced to the church itself and a few fragments of all the other buildings which had once stood there when it housed a big community of monks. In this case there was a paved courtyard leading to the church-door and a few pointed arches which had once been part of a cloister.

'I love the colour', said his wife. 'It's such a change from the grey churches at home.'

The ancient stones had weathered to that same warm yellowish pink which, they were learning, was the commonest tint for Greek churches which had not actually been white-washed. The shape, too, was what they were beginning to know as typical. No lofty towers or soaring spires pointed heavenwards. The high, cliff-like walls were surmounted by a squat dome, almost like a lid, firmly placed on the top of the church as if to hold it down. Byzantine churches were solidly rooted in the earth, whereas the Gothic churches of the West always looked as though they were trying to reach Heaven.

Yet Martin saw what Mrs Wharton meant. Set against its background of dusky pines, the honey-golden church had a fairy-tale loveliness of its own.

They filed into the courtyard and stood looking at it. Two great cypresses, tall and slender as pillars, flanked the steps which led up to the open door. Their green leafy spires, straining up to reach the sunshine out of that cool well of shadows, provided just that hint of Gothic contrast to set off the serene semi-circles which arched the door and windows between them.

'Of course, the great thing here is the mosaics', said Mr Wharton, leading the way inside.

The lower parts of the walls were plain—they had been richly decorated once, but during many troubled centuries all their

adornment had disappeared except for a narrow cornice of flowers and birds, carved in stone. But above were the famous mosaics, and to the children, gazing up, it seemed as though the heavens had opened to reveal a host of angels and archangels, saints and prophets.

Here, built up with infinite pains and skill, from hundreds of thousands of tiny separate stones, was the whole Gospel story from the shepherds 'watching their flocks by night' to the Crucifixion. Here, indeed, *was* the Bible for poor people who could not read. The main events of the New Testament were all here—or had been, for Time had made a few gaps in the sequence.

'There are the Three Kings', whispered Nicola, pointing.

'And Jesus as a baby—look, there's the ox and the ass!'

'There's another donkey, Martin—oh, that's Christ entering Jerusalem. He's riding side-saddle.'

'Men often do, in Greece', interposed her father. 'Just you notice when you're out in the country.'

Mrs Wharton was studying the Last Supper. 'It's very interesting', she said at last. 'One's seen it done so often in Italian paintings. This is all so different. I don't say I like this style of thing *better*, but it's fresh. It gives you a new feeling.'

'Yes. Daphni is a very good place to start looking at Byzantine art—'

'Why, Daddy?'

'Well, these mosaics *are* Byzantine, of course, but in some ways they're not quite so different from what we've been used to in Western art—not quite so different, I mean, as some you may see in other places. Western people are often put off by the stiffness of Byzantine figures. They look more formal and stylized, not so realistic and alive as they do, say, in an Italian painting or a Flemish one.'

'I should think they can't help being stiffer', ventured Martin. 'I mean, these are all made up of different-coloured stones, aren't they? But if a chap was painting on something smooth and flat, well, the brush would have a sort of *flow*, wouldn't it? If you see what I mean.'

'I do indeed', said Mr Wharton. 'You've put your finger on one of the basic differences between the two forms of art. Of course,

it's not so simple as all that. The Byzantine artist *saw* things differently too—he wasn't after quite the same thing as the artists in the West—but here in Daphni the style is a bit closer to the type of thing we're used to. When people start on Byzantine art, Daphni is useful as a kind of bridge. It helps us to cross from the world we know to the one we don't.'

The place of honour—the vaulted ceiling under the dome—was filled by a wonderful mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, as the Greeks called Him, Christ the Almighty Judge and Redeemer.

'You will always find Him in this central position in the great Byzantine churches', explained Mr Wharton.

Martin was struck by the strength and manliness of the portrait. So many religious pictures he had seen were what he privately regarded as 'soppy', especially when they set out to depict our Lord.

It was no 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' that looked down on them, in the very act of blessing, from the dome overhead. This Byzantine Christ looked like a leader, a true Heavenly King. He was encircled by a ring of saints and prophets, and four angels filled the spaces between the supporting arches, but He would have dominated the whole group even if He had not been much larger than any of the other figures.

'How old is all this?' asked Mrs Wharton as they walked slowly out into the courtyard.

'Eleventh century. Just about the time William the Conqueror was charging up the hill at Hastings.'

They picked up their lunch-basket and walked a little distance to find a place for their picnic.

'Daphni', said Martin thoughtfully. 'What a funny name for a monastery! It sounds more like a girl.'

'There's a reason for that', said Mr Wharton. 'You may remember—' ('You know jolly well I don't', Martin said to himself, 'but you're tactful, so you pretend I do!')—'the legend of the nymph Daphne. How Apollo fell in love with her and chased her, and she called on the other gods to save her, and they changed her into a laurel tree? Well, this is where it happened.'

'Really?' asked Nicola, round-eyed. 'Honestly, Daddy? No, I don't mean "did it really happen", but is this where the Greeks thought it happened?'

'It is indeed. There was a temple to Apollo where the monastery stands now—didn't you see that there were bits of temple built into the walls of the church? And there used to be lots of sacred laurel growing here. As you know, it became Apollo's favourite tree.'

'I should have thought he'd have *hated* it!' said Martin vigorously, and the others all burst out laughing.

\* \* \*

Holy Week was now moving towards the tragic anniversary of Good Friday. There was a strange feeling in the city. Normal life and work were slowing down. But whereas, in the last hours before Christmas, everybody's spirits are rising and people's excitement bubbles over in noise and bustle, there was now a sort of tension in the air. It was as though the agony of the Crucifixion was to be enacted all over again, as though Jesus was once more to be sentenced and hung on the cross. The Greeks, intensely imaginative and emotional, seemed to be reliving the events which had taken place in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago.

'Fasting helps', Martin's father told him. 'I've noticed it in the East with Moslems. *They* have these long fasts, too, and that's the time when tempers get sharpened—and sometimes knives as well. Fasts and riots have often gone together.'

On the evening of their picnic at Daphni—Maundy Thursday—all the churches in Athens seemed to be packed with people, and when Martin and his father took an evening stroll through the city it was barely possible to get their noses inside the door of the cathedral.

'Standing room only', commented Mr Murry.

'They all stand anyhow.' Martin felt quite an authority on the Greek Orthodox Church after his excursion with the Whartons. 'There aren't any pews like ours.'

They could just see the priest in the far distance, clad in mourning robes, standing by the altar. All the church was draped in mourning, the usual bright and shining icons being covered from view. A bystander whispered to them, in broken American, that this was the service of the Twelve Gospels, and that the priest was just reading the fifth lesson. As he concluded it, there was a stir among the congregation and, over the heads of the people in front

of him, Martin saw a great wooden cross being carried forward. It was fixed upright, somehow, on the floor of the cathedral, and a velvet embroidered cloth was hung on it. Then the service went on, and, as the Murrays did not understand the classical Greek in which it was conducted, they soon slipped away.

Martin awoke next morning to hear every bell in Athens tolling mournfully, as though for a funeral. Good Friday! Of course! Apart from those monotonous bells, so unmusical compared with the chimes he was used to at home, the town was almost quiet—quiet, that is to say, compared with its usual noisy self. The shops were shut, the cafés deserted, the traffic had dwindled to a trickle. Foreigner though he was, Martin felt infected by the general atmosphere of gloom. He would be glad when this Greek Easter was over.

It did not improve his temper to realize that he was not seeing his friends until the evening, when they were to meet for the Epitaphios procession. There was a long day to get through. In the morning he mooched through the deserted streets, and, finding himself outside the cathedral, peeped through the open door. The cross still stood where he had seen it the previous evening, but now it rose from a vast bed of spring flowers—yellow and white and blue and pink, made up of a thousand individual posies, some with the dew of the countryside still glistening upon them. As he stood there, a latecomer walked in, a policeman in his green uniform, and knelt to place his own bunch of narcissi among the others.

Somehow Martin got through the rest of the day, helped by a book called *Everyday Things in Ancient Greece* by Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell. It had been lent him by Nicola, whose father had bought it for her in London to read on her journey. A week or two ago Martin would have shied away from any volume with such a title, but it was packed with interesting pictures and the reading matter proved far easier and more interesting than he would have expected. There was a lot about the Acropolis and also about Homer, Odysseus, and Nausicaa, and, as the book was intended for boys and girls, it did not assume that the reader knew much already. It explained things simply and yet not childishly. For Martin, with his new-made resolution to find out something

about the ancient Greeks, it was (in his own phrase) 'just the job'.

When evening came the street outside the hotel began to fill with people, making for the various churches or the vantage-points from which they intended to view the procession. By the time Mr Murry and Martin set off for the office, it was getting quite difficult to thrust their way along the pavements. Luckily they were only a stone's throw from Constitution Square. There, the people were already standing three or four deep along the kerb. Candle-sellers were doing a brisk trade, and there were gipsy-looking beggars who (Martin had been told) always converged upon the city at times like this. In the ordinary way, Athens was not a bad place for beggars—they were not nearly so common as in some foreign capitals.

Nicola and her parents were waiting in the newspaper offices on the second floor. Desks and typewriters had been moved away from the windows and several of the Greek staff and their friends were there.

'It's a good job you gave us those passes, Murry', said Mr Wharton. 'The police wouldn't have let us through otherwise.'

'Yes, I was warned about that. It seems everybody tries to squeeze into Constitution Square tonight—and into one of the buildings if they can—so there has to be some kind of control.'

They had a long time to wait before the procession started. Processions, rather, for there would be one from every church in the city, though the main one would leave from the cathedral and would include the official representatives of the Government and various public bodies.

'It's really meant to be Christ's funeral', said Mr Wharton. 'We shall see a coffin, with the sacred icon laid on it. They carry it through the main streets and all round the square here, and then take it back to the cathedral to await the Resurrection. It's all symbolical.'

It was quite dark by now. The square below them was a shifting, murmuring mass of figures. Everyone was holding a lighted candle. The dark square was dotted with ten thousand tiny wavering tongues of flame—it was like a field of fiery crocuses. A smiling Greek typist handed Martin and Nicola a candle each.





ABOVE *Mr. Wharton said the theatre at Epidaurus was the best preserved in existence* BELOW *The original site of the Olympic Games. Only a few pillars still stood upright*





*Olympia lay in a flat well wooded luxuriant plain. The ruins filled the broad space between the river bank and the slopes of a little cone shaped hill.*

'Mind you don't drip grease on your coat', murmured Mrs Wharton anxiously.

'I won't, Mummy. We *must* join in.'

They were out on the balcony by now, tightly wedged against the balustrade. The Greeks in the office, with their usual courtesy and thoughtfulness, insisted that the foreigners—and the children especially—should have the front places.

'Oh, *look!*' cried Nicola, pointing with her free hand.

It was as though the sky above the rooftops were slowly unwinding a necklace of stars. The yellow points came slanting downwards, then looped back, but still descending, the thread of lights ever lengthening.

'I know, it's candles!' exclaimed Martin. 'It's on Lycabettus. You remember the little church on the top? It's *their* procession, coming down that zigzag path.'

There was something particularly beautiful about that line of golden lights, uncoiling down the slopes of the invisible hill.

After that they had not long to wait before the main procession came into view down one of the streets leading into Constitution Square.

It was worth the long wait. Slowly it moved up the gentle slope under their balcony, turned along the upper side of the square in front of the Parliament buildings, and came down on the far side, half-hidden by the shrubs and statues between.

There were soldiers and sailors and airmen, marching in ranks, there were Scouts and Guides in uniform and detachments of ordinary school-children—Nicola was swift to notice, and remark enviously, that some of the girls had very grown-up high heels!—there were frock-coated members of the Government and dark-suited representatives of lesser organizations. But, as Martin's father irreverently observed, it was the priests who 'stole the show'.

Superb men in themselves, with their long white beards which had never known the razor, they were arrayed in glory like kings. Now, for the first time, Martin saw the full beauty of Byzantine art expressed in church vestments. The candle-light gleamed on all the colours of the rainbow—scarlet and blue and mauve, leaf-green and palest yellow, silver and gold, the finest silks crusted with the most intricate embroideries.

Nicola nudged her mother. Martin caught her awe-struck 'Oo-oooh, Mummy!' and Mrs Wharton's sympathetic murmur in reply. He gathered that the two ladies were agreeing that such materials were rather wasted on bearded men.

There were choir-boys carrying electric 'candles', men holding up splendid banners, others swinging incense and blessing the crowds to right and left.

'There's the Archbishop', whispered Mr Wharton. 'And here's the funeral bier with the icon laid on it—'

'What a *mass* of flowers!' said Nicola.

In fact all they could see was a mountain of spring flowers, lit up by candles, passing slowly beneath the balcony. By now the choristers had reached the top of the hill and wheeled on to the level road. They began to sing. The thin, vibrant chanting was indescribably moving as it rang out through the cool night air, above the slow tread of the marchers and the wordless murmur of the spectators.

Now the ordinary people, candle in hand, were tagging on behind the official procession. Gradually the vast concourse in the square dissolved, some thronging down the street back to the cathedral, others dispersing to their homes. The little party in the office broke up. Mrs Wharton once more began to think about bed-times. Nicola winked at Martin, but she was sleepy and so was he.

Saturday was another quiet day. Martin saw a band playing in the street, which livened things up for a few minutes, and noticed that the flags, which had all been at half-mast the day before, were now being hoisted again. The hotel-porter explained that this was for the '*Proti Anastasis*' but that the proper '*Anastasis*' would not begin till midnight. *Anastasis*, Martin discovered, was the Greek for the Resurrection.

The porter, along with more than seven million fellow-Greeks, was now thinking of nothing but the *Anastasis*. He rolled his eyes as he described the feasting which would take place all over the country on Easter Sunday. There would be juicy roast lamb for every family, however poor—indeed, for the poor people in the country it was often the only time in the year when they could afford to eat meat. There were not enough sheep in Greece to

supply all the dinner-tables tomorrow—whole shiploads of lambs had been coming across from Turkey during the past week.

The porter wiped imaginary grease from his magnificent black moustache as he told Martin of the delights that were now so near at hand for the fasting population—the whole lambs roasted on spits, the tender titbits to be grilled on skewers, the glasses of red wine and fiery *ouzo*.

By promising her mother to take a long sleep that afternoon, Nicola had gained permission to stay up for the *Anastasis*.

‘She’d never sleep through it anyhow’, said Mr Wharton. ‘When midnight comes the most awful hullabaloo will break out—bells and fireworks and Heaven knows what.’

When Martin had heard that there would be fireworks, he had suggested to his father that he too might stay up and see them. So the two families had joined forces for another evening, but this time they went to the Whartons’ flat and sat there, drinking tea, until nearly midnight. Then, wrapping up well against the night air, they went down to the cathedral.

Most of Athens seemed to have had the same idea. There was no getting near the doors—they could just catch a glimpse of the golden candle-light inside and an occasional snatch of singing. A platform had been set up outside and this was occupied by rows of solemn-looking gentlemen with candles in their hands. Some were Greek Cabinet Ministers, others were foreign ambassadors.

When Martin’s wrist-watch showed five to twelve, there was a sudden ripple through the crowd, followed by an expectant hush. All heads were turned towards the open doors of the cathedral. Someone was coming out. It was the man who had been pointed out the previous evening as the Archbishop of Athens. With him came two young priests, one bearing a candle.

The Archbishop made his way to the platform with measured tread and mounted the steps. He began to read from a handsome Bible held up in front of him. Dropping his eyes, Martin saw that the hands of his watch were almost overlapping. It was nearly twelve. There was not a sound to be heard but the sonorous voice of the Archbishop reading the Gospel.

Suddenly that even voice stopped. In a new, electrifying tone

the Archbishop cried: '*Christos anesti!*' and on all sides it was taken up.

'*CHRISTOS ANESTI!*'

Nicola tugged at her father's sleeve excitedly. He bent his head to catch her question amid the general hubbub. 'What are they saying, Daddy?'

'*Christos anesti*. "Christ is risen".'

Somewhere near at hand a military band blared forth. Bells clanged from every quarter of the city. Factory sirens screamed. And then the fireworks began to crackle and bang. Red and green rockets shot across the sky, golden rain descended. . . . Strangely serene and aloof from it all, the Acropolis—floodlit in honour of the occasion—rode high above the quivering belfries and the sea-like murmur of the crowded streets.

Everyone was laughing and smiling. It was like Christmas suddenly—only, as this was Greece, it was Easter. Perfect strangers were exchanging delighted greetings. '*Christos anesti!*' and '*Kala Paskha!*'—'Happy Easter!'

Whceew! went the rockets, and then, Zzzzz, as they dived earthwards.

Nicola put her mouth close to Martin's ear. 'Don't forget to come round in the morning', she bawled, 'Anna's got a super egg for you!'

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMER COMES TO THE CITY

'You know I'm sorry for that boy', said Mr Wharton with even more deliberation than usual.

'Martin?' queried his wife, the teapot poised in her hand. They were sitting on their balcony. Miles away, the blue water stretched to the islands of Salamis and Aegina. From beneath them, nearer at hand, came the steady hum of the city, waking from the comparative peace of the early afternoon. Every day now it was getting warmer. Spring was turning into summer.

'What's wrong with Martin?' demanded Nicola, in arms at once to defend her own generation.

'The lad's all at sea.'

'He jolly well wishes he was! He wants to be a sailor.'

'It's one thing to sail. But he seems all adrift.'

'It's not *his* fault, Daddy!'

'Did I say it was? I'm not saying it's anybody's fault—though I do think that father of his tends to be a bit casual at times.'

'He's so terribly busy—he's always having to dash off at all hours of the day and night. Going to conferences and getting these communiqués and things. Even when he fixes up to take Martin somewhere, the telephone goes, and quite often they have to wash everything out. It's rotten for poor old M. tin.'

\* \* \*

Mr Wharton had not been quite fair in his judgment of Martin's father.

That was natural enough. The two men were of such different types, it was not easy for them to appreciate each other. Mr Murry was apt to think of Nicola's father as an unworldly, dry-as-dust University lecturer. Mr Wharton, in turn, detested bright cheap journalism with its slick, over-simple answers to the world's problems, and he was apt to distrust the sincerity of any man who earned his living in that field. But he was too good-natured to refuse any appeal for help, and when Mr Murry rang up, the day after the foregoing conversation, saying that he was worried and

wanted his advice, Mr Wharton at once agreed to go round for a drink and a chat at six o'clock that evening.

'It's about the boy', said Mr Murry, as soon as they were settled at a café table. In his profession he was trained not to waste words beating about the bush.

'Martin?'

'Yes. I thought he was glad to be finished with school. He seems to have changed his mind. This place Nicky's going to, next week—any chance of getting him in there, as late as this?'

'You could try. I think it would be an excellent idea.'

'I'll get on to them first thing in the morning.' Mr Murry took a long pull at his drink. 'This arrangement isn't working out too well. I've made rather a mess of things, Wharton. I thought it would solve everything, having him with me. But it's not so simple.'

'He'll be better at school during the day. He'll meet other boys, too.'

'Ye-es. But that's not all. He's on at me now to move to a flat, so we can have a place of our own. It's not so easy, Wharton. *You* know, furnished flats don't grow on trees in Athens—the city's overcrowded. And we'd need a maid or a housekeeper or something.'

'It's a problem.'

'You're telling me it's a problem! I can see well enough the kid needs some home-life. And I can't give it him, not in my job. I've got to go to Turkey in a fortnight. I don't like leaving him on his own in the hotel, but what am I to do? My agency won't pay *his* expenses every time I have to make a trip.'

'Of course not. And if they would, you couldn't do your job properly with him in tow.'

Mr Murry brightened a little. 'I'm glad you understand, anyhow. I'm afraid you and your wife must think I'm a pretty poor sort of parent—'

'Not at all. We're extremely sorry, though—we do see how awkwardly you're placed.'

'Oh well, it'll be something if we can get him into that school. Now would it be all right with you if I mentioned your name, said you knew the kid—'

'By all means!'

For a few minutes they talked about Byron College. Mr



Wharton explained how it was that Greece possessed several big private schools run on British or American lines. Greece had always admired the English public school system—which itself owed a lot to the ancient Greek ideals of intellectual training combined with athletics—and there were several schools which, though run primarily for Greeks, were largely staffed by Englishmen, or nowadays (with American and Canadian influence increasing) by teachers from across the Atlantic. There was Athens College, for example, and now Anavryton, the latter attended by the Crown Prince of Greece and run by a British headmaster on the same lines as Gordonstoun in Scotland, where the Duke of Edinburgh had received his early education. For girls there was Pierce College down near the sea at Elliniko.

The children of British or American people living in Greece might go to the Anglo-American School out at Psychico, or to Byron College, which was smaller but not so far from the centre of the town. In the old days there had been a majority of British children, but of late, owing to the various American missions and organizations operating in Greece, the young Americans far outnumbered them.

'So don't blame me if young Martin comes back with an American accent!' chuckled Mr Wharton.

'I'm not worried about that. I'll broaden his mind a bit more.'

'That's what we feel about Nicola. Look, Murry,' said Mr Wharton in a more serious tone, 'I've had another idea. You might care to consider it.'

'Yes?'

'Just as a stop-gap arrangement, until you can hit on something better, why not let Martin come to us for a few weeks?'

'That's—that's a very handsome offer, Wharton. What about your wife, though?'

Again Mr Wharton chuckled. 'I think I can speak for her, though of course we'll have to discuss it. She's just dying to mother Martin for as long as you can spare him.'

\* \* \*

On the following evening the two families met again, as Mr Murry's guests, to celebrate a double event: Martin's acceptance by Byron College for the summer term and the arrangement

(welcomed by all, including Anna) that he should move over to the Whartons' flat for a little while.

One end of the balcony would have to be his bedroom, but Martin thought that was going to be fun, now that the warm weather had really arrived.

His father took them all to a *taverna* which had been recommended to him by one of his fellow-journalists. At the moment, it was one of the favourite eating-places among those who really knew their way about in Athens.

At first they wondered where on earth they were getting to. The big taxi left the smart shopping streets behind and plunged into the rabbit-warren of twisty back-streets at the foot of the Acropolis. Open-fronted shops displayed their goods by the crude light of flares. The roads were full of pot-holes, the pavements non-existent.

'This is it', said Mr Murry suddenly.

The taxi slowed down and wheeled to a standstill. The headlights rested on a plaster wall, a small doorway, a window with gaily painted shutters lolling on their hinges, an outdoor staircase climbing into the upper gloom. It was rather like a stage set.

Mr Murry paid off the taximan. 'Shall I lead the way?' he asked Mrs Wharton. 'It looks rather like the Den of Forty Thieves, but the food really is good. Everyone says, if you want to eat well in Athens, these *tavernas* are the places to go to.'

Nicola and her mother followed him inside a little doubtfully, but their doubts faded as they crossed the threshold.

The *taverna* was quite small. There were about a dozen tables, covered with clean white cloths. But what caught the eye of the new arrivals was the kitchen at the far end, all agleam with polished dishes and dangling knives and ladles, with naked flames leaping up and spluttering gaily from the massive brick-built stove. Over the kitchen hung the *taverna's* principal decoration—a fish depicted in brightly-coloured tiles, regarding a plate with a somewhat doleful expression.

'This is going to be fun', murmured Nicola as the proprietor bustled forward to greet them. The place was still empty, for Greeks tended to eat late and Mr Murry had timed the party early for the sake of the children.

'Come and look at the kitchen before you settle down', he invited Mrs Wharton. 'Seems it's quite the thing to do. You pick the bit of meat or the fish or whatever you fancy, and tell 'em just exactly how you want it cooked.'

'I'd sooner leave that to you. We're in your hands tonight.'

None the less, Mrs Wharton followed him to the far end of the room, and the others went after them, to peer with interest into the mysteries of the kitchen. A jovial-looking cook waved his hand hospitably to indicate the pink and white rows of uncooked chops on a tray, the shrimps and the red mullets, the artichokes and spinach and other vegetables.

Mr Murry conferred earnestly with the proprietor, with Mr Wharton venturing an occasional modest comment from the background, and after a full five minutes the two men rejoined Mrs Wharton and the children, who had taken their seats at the table.

'All settled?' she inquired.

'You were a time', said Martin.

'Food is a serious business', Mr Wharton told him gravely. 'When Greek cooking is good, it's well worth a little planning. It isn't always good. They often make things too oily, and some of them just won't learn that hot food needs a warm plate. But I have a feeling that all is going to be well, very well, tonight.'

It was.

Nicola and Martin were privately sorry, at first, that their fathers had decided against soup. Afterwards they were thankful, for they would never have managed to put away all that followed.

The meal began with *dolmades*, which were tasty balls of mince-meat wrapped up in leaves—vine-leaves, said Mr Murry—and covered with sauce.

After this came tender pieces of lamb grilled on skewers with rice and chopped onions and delicious golden-brown potatoes, fried in the olive-oil that was sizzling at the far end of the room. This meat dish was called *souvlakia* in Greece, but Mr Murry said it was well known all over the Balkans and South Russia under various names.

The two men began exchanging information about Greek cooking. Mr Wharton knew the names of all the best dishes to look out for, and Mr Murry looked at him with increasing respect.

They talked of *pastitsio makaronia* (mincemeat and macaroni pie), *pilafi* (rice), *keftedes* (rissoles), and *avgolemono*, the sauce consisting of beaten egg and lemon-juice which was mostly used in soups. They discussed—rather to the children's horror—such delicacies as *kokoretsi*, the entrails of young lambs grilled on skewers.

'I say', broke in Martin anxiously, 'these aren't *kokoretsi* we're eating now?'

Mr Wharton laughed. 'No, no. These are quite respectable, unembarrassing portions of the lamb's anatomy.'

'An Exchange Telegraph fellow,' said Mr Murry, 'was advising me to try *kalamarakia*—'

'Ah, yes, squids.'

'Does that mean octopus?' Nicola looked horrified.

'Well, little ones. They're only a kind of fish, after all. Lots of Greeks eat them. They cut up the arms and fry them—'

'Ugh!'

'Or stew the baby ones—'

'Daddy!'

'Now don't spoil a beautiful dinner', said Mrs Wharton, firmly intervening. 'Let's enjoy what we're eating—not worry about what we're not.'

Mr Murry was drinking *retsina*, but Mrs Wharton made a face at its flavour—she agreed with her husband that it tasted of turpentine, so she joined him in a glass of ordinary red wine which had not been resinated in the way most Greeks liked it. Martin had fizzy lemonade out of a bottle, but Nicola preferred natural lemon juice, freshly squeezed, with water and spoonfuls of coarse sugar.

For a sweet, all the grown-ups ordered yoghourt, which was sour cream set in a kind of jelly. Mr Wharton said it would make them live for ever—it was supposed to be a wonderful food and many centenarians gave it the credit for their long life—but the children turned up their noses at it and said it was too cheesy, however much sugar was sprinkled on it.

Smiling, the waiter brought them a basket of oranges, apples, and bananas.

'*Portokali*, please', said Martin when Nicola had made her choice. The waiter offered him the basket, and he picked out a juicy-looking orange.

Mr Murry glanced across the table at Mr Wharton and smiled. 'Portokali, eh?' he murmured. 'He's even learning the language now!'

Mr Wharton nodded and smiled back. He too was pleased to notice how well the boy was settling down and getting his bearings.

The grown-ups were just sipping their coffee and brandy, and lighting up their cigarettes, when the door of the *taverna* opened and two brown-faced musicians entered, carrying guitars, and saluted the proprietor in a friendly manner.

'Are they going to play?' whispered Nicola. 'Oh, I do hope they will.'

'They will', chuckled her father.

They did more than play, they sang. They sang specially for the English party at the corner table—for indeed only two or three of the other tables were as yet occupied. They came right up to the five friends, their dark eyes and their white teeth flashing, their brown fingers quivering over the guitar-strings. They sang—nobody knew quite what they sang, even Mr Wharton could only guess. One song seemed to be all gay pattering nonsense, another sounded like a love-song. The musicians hung and swayed over the table, their hearts and souls in their singing, and such bubbling good-humour in their faces that Nicola found herself grinning back at them. This seemed to encourage them to even greater efforts. They looked straight at her and plunged into another song.

'This seems to be specially in your honour', laughed Mr Murry.

'You're being serenaded', said her father.

Nicola went rather pink. She was aware that the other diners were turning and smiling in her direction. She felt self-conscious, but, at the same time, she felt pleasantly grown-up. And when a flower-seller came in and went round the tables, and Mr Murry bought sprays of flowers for her mother and herself to pin on their dresses, she felt, as her father expressed it, 'no end of a dog'.

It was a wonderful evening altogether. And it was crowned, when they finally emerged from the *taverna* into the brilliance of the full moon, by a quick visit to the Acropolis, which was always kept open on two or three evenings of each month.

The ancient marble took on a new beauty in the soft silvery

light which bathed it. Night masked the tumbled untidiness of the ground and gave back, in odd glimpses, the illusion that the various shrines were perfect once more. The long pillared aisles of the Parthenon marched in alternate shine and shadow, stretching away into the night like some forest avenue. The caryatids became mysterious moon-maidens, standing there, timeless and inscrutable, holding up the roof of the Erechtheum. Their marble draperies seemed to tremble, ever so slightly, as the breeze sent the cloud-shadows flowing over them.

'You know', said Mr Murry, 'there is something about this place.'

\* \* \*

A few days later Mr Murry departed for Ankara on his Turkish assignment, Martin moved over to the Whartons' flat, and he and Nicola started at Byron College.

The school lay a little way to the north of the city centre and had developed round a big house standing in grounds, part of which had since been built over for extra classrooms. The grass was beginning to look thin and dusty, very different from the lawns of a school at home—but there were orange trees with real oranges on them, glowing like lamps among the leaves, and where at home, Nicola demanded, could you have seen *them*?

There was no school-uniform at Byron and the children from England were a little taken aback at their first sight of their future class-mates, clustered round the front steps or on the terrace that opening morning.

Nicola could only hope that her blue and white print dress was not too obviously the official summer garb of her other school—the girls here were in much brighter dresses, if they were in dresses at all. Odd skirts, gay sweaters, and jeans were commoner. Hair-styles were varied, and not all the styles would have passed the scrutiny of her own headmistress. As for the earrings, bracelets, and odd rings . . . 'Well!' said Nicola under her breath. Even Martin looked conspicuously formal in his grey flannel suit and plain white shirt—some of the other boys' shirts could hold their own with the girls' clothes when it came to bright colours.

It was clear enough, as they had been told, that there were now more American children than English ones living in Greece.

When they got their timetables—they were in the same form—they saw that they would be learning American History instead of English. Otherwise, of course, the subjects were all the usual ones, maths. and science, English and French, geography, singing, handicrafts, and so on. The staff were mostly American and the discipline seemed rather free and easy. 'Self-government' was the principle at Byron.

'How are you going to like it?' Nicola inquired as they went home.

'Oh, all right, I think', said Martin cautiously.

'Anyhow, the work isn't going to kill us. Fancy, when it gets really hot in a week or two, there won't be any afternoon school! Come at eight and finish for the day at twelve!'

'Pity there's no cricket. Only basket-ball!'

'But they take us swimming. And they go out for hikes and picnics in the mountains—Jinny told me.'

It was typical that Nicola had already made a friend, whereas Martin scarcely knew the names of the children sitting next to him.

Fortunately, as it turned out, Nicola's friend had a twin brother in the class, and within a day or two they had drifted quite naturally into a foursome. This was all the easier because the twins had not previously had any other specially close friends. They were among the very few Greek children attending Byron—their names were Andreas and Virginia Mavr. ki.

'Why did you come to Byron?' asked Nicola.

'Our father is in shipping—' began Andy.

'He wishes Andy to speak very good English', interrupted Jinny.

'It is so important in our business—'

'And I said I wanted to go to the same school as Andy—'

The twins were always interrupting each other. They were very alike, with dark brown hair and good features. The previous term, when the class had acted scenes from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, they had been cast as the twins, Sebastian and Viola.

'It was fun—' said Jinny.

'I hated it—' said Andy.

There would be no acting that term, said Jinny, but the school

was planning a trip to Delphi to see a play at the ancient theatre there on the open mountainside.

'That would be super', declared Nicola.

\* \* \*

As one day followed another, the Whartons and their guest settled into the life of Athens. Mrs Wharton, aided by sage tips from Anna, began to do more and more of her own marketing. Mr Wharton had his own work—he was out every morning at the University or the British School of Archaeology or at some museum or other. Martin and Nicola enjoyed school. It gave their lives a thread of routine, yet, at the same time, the work was not too hard and the short school-day left them plenty of time to themselves.

So, sometimes with the Mavraki twins, sometimes by themselves, sometimes with one or other of their parents, the two friends gradually familiarized themselves with all the sights of Athens.

There were the classical remains to start with—nestling under the sheer southward face of the Acropolis were the great theatre of Dionysus and the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. Both were semi-circular, with rows and rows of stone seats rising in tiers, but, whereas the theatre had always been open to the sky, the Odeon, a smaller affair—'seating a mere five thousand people!' Mr Wharton had commented dryly—had been covered with a roof of cedar-wood, which the raiding barbarian Goths had burnt when they broke into Athens during the later days of the Roman Empire. The Odeon had been built for concerts and plays in the second century A.D. by a Roman millionaire, Herodes Atticus. That was in the reign of Hadrian, himself a great lover and benefactor of Athens.

'He was so fond of everything to do with Greece that they called him "the Greekling",' said Mr Wharton.

'Hadrian, Daddy?'

'Yes. He rebuilt so much of Athens and enlarged it, they put up that memorial arch after he died—'

'Oh, we passed it the first day. I'm always meaning to go and have a closer look at it.'

'When you do, look at the inscription—it's still visible. On one



side, it says, "*This is Athens, once the city of Theseus*", and on the other, facing the new suburbs he built, "*This is the city of Hadrian, not of Theseus*". I don't know whether Hadrian would have really liked that. He wasn't a boastful type.'

Mr Wharton had no patience with people who cared only for the older Greek ruins and looked down on anything Roman or later. As he pointed out, if the Odeon had stood in Italy, everyone would have flocked to see it. Here they rushed past it to see the still older theatre of Dionysus. Yet a Roman building in Athens, like a Turkish house or a Venetian fort elsewhere in Greece, was all part of the country's long history.

All the same, Nicola could understand the special appeal held by the theatre.

It was not a question of its being larger—though it had in fact held anything up to twenty thousand spectators—but of its associations.

Here was the cradle of European drama. Here, for the first time, audiences had watched the world's oldest plays—and some of the best—*Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, *Antigone* by Sophocles, *The Trojan Women* by Euripides, tragedies that still ranked among the sublimest ever written. . . . Here, too, lolling in the spring sunshine, the Athenians had enjoyed the witty comedies of Aristophanes, fearlessly poking fun at their statesmen and their institutions in such satires as *The Birds* and *The Frogs* and *The Women in Parliament*.

'And they must have been able to watch the ships out at sea!' said Martin as they stood high up among the seats, gazing down at the space below where once the chorus had moved to and fro in their stately, intricate dance-formations and at the narrow stage beyond where the actors, heavily masked and magnificently robed, had thundered their long speeches or bandied their crisp retorts. Then, as now, the blue Bay of Salamis must have been visible in the background, and no doubt there had been war-galleys and sailing merchantmen where today he could pick out a destroyer, a French liner, and innumerable smaller craft.

'You *would* think of that!' jeered Nicola. 'They'd have been much too interested in the play.'

'I bet they weren't always. The Athenians were jolly critical. I

was reading somewhere', said Martin stoutly, 'if they thought a play was really bad, they pretty well hooted it off the stage.'

Nicola made no reply, but she looked at him with a new respect. Martin was beginning to dig about for himself. If a subject caught his interest, he had a more accurate memory than she had.

She went hopping down the gangway steps to examine the front row of seats, where it was still possible to see the special places reserved for the priests of the different gods and goddesses. The drama festivals had been specially in honour of Dionysus, who was god of the theatre as well as of wine, so the place in the very middle of the row had been occupied by his priest. What a gay religion the Greeks had had, when theatre-going was also an act of worship! But then her father said that their religion had a darker side, about which we knew much less—the cult of the Underworld, as well as the bright myths about the Olympians—and in the long run the more intelligent Greeks had not found their creed at all satisfying.

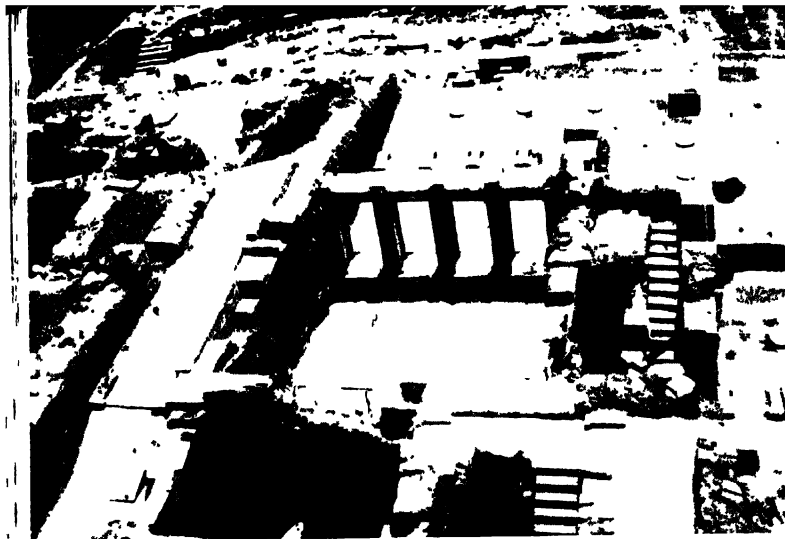
She thought of the Arcopagus Hill nearby, and the tablet there let into the rock, commemorating St Paul's sermon on the Unknown God. He had preached it there in A.D. 54, only a quarter of a century after the Crucifixion, and long before Herodes Atticus had built his Odeon for the concerts and plays of Roman times.

The thought came back to her another day when she and Martin went looking for the 'prison of Socrates'. It was one of three rock-hewn caves on another hill, a little to the south, called the Hill of the Muses. It was pointed out to tourists as the cell where the great philosopher, sentenced to death because he had spoken his mind too freely even for Athens, had drunk the poison offered by his jailer as the sun went down. Mr Wharton had refused to go. He said that the caves had nothing whatever to do with Socrates—they were ancient tombs, which had probably been used as dwellings during the acute housing shortage when Athens was crammed with refugees at the time of her war with Sparta. But Nicola had felt she wanted to see the place, though she agreed afterwards that she couldn't really imagine Socrates there, sitting with his friends all round him, drinking wine and discussing the immortality of the soul, as his young pupil, Plato, afterwards recorded.

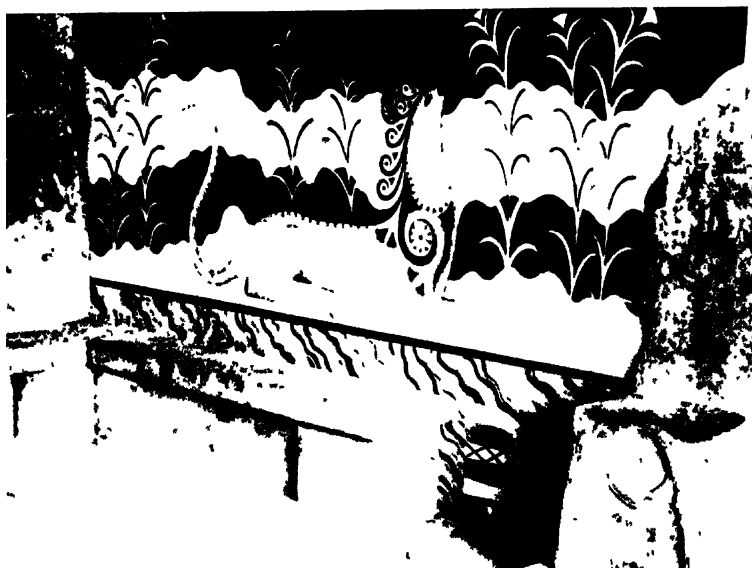
Socrates had been another who had found the old myths too



*The end of the day. 'Most Greek farms were very small, run by peasant-owners and their families.'*



ABOVE: The ancient palace of King Minos at Knossos in Crete. The Hall of the Double Axes. BELOW: The King's Throne, with its scalloped leaf shaped back.



illogical to satisfy him. He had been another proper after the Unknown God. What a pity he had lived four or five hundred years too soon to meet St Paul! What a conversation the two men might have had—and Plato could have written it all down!

‘There are plenty of *genuine* sites to look at’, Mr Wharton had said. And of course there were.

There was the actual stone platform, the Bema, where Pericles and Demosthenes and all the other famous orators had made their speeches to the assembled voters. If the world’s drama had been cradled in the lee of the Acropolis, it was just as true that democracy stemmed from the slopes of this adjoining hill, the Pnyx, where the rough-hewn steps of the Bema jutted out of the native rock. Here, at meeting-times, the citizens had come streaming up from the busy market-place below.

The market-place was a site which the children visited with Nicola’s father, because a good deal of important excavation was in progress under the direction of American archaeologists. Mr Wharton knew one of them, so that they had the benefit of an expert guide to take them round the complicated six-acre site and explain what public buildings had stood on the foundation walls.

‘Most of them were destroyed when the barbarians sacked Athens in A.D. 267’, he said.

‘The time when the roof of the Odeon was burnt?’ asked Martin.

‘That’s right, son. Athens was never the same again after that disaster. We find that a lot of the building material from here got used in later fortifications, but of course these foundations stayed, like roots in the ground. Then, year by year, the rains washed soil down off the hill, and they got covered up. Now we’re digging them out again, and trying to figure out just what was what.’

To the west of the Agora was a temple, much less damaged than the Parthenon and giving rather a good idea of what the Parthenon must once have looked like. It was con., only known as the Theseum, after the legendary Athenian hero Theseus who, by slaying the Minotaur, had freed Athens from her tribute to the Cretan king. Actually it had more probably been the temple of Hephaestus, the smith-god (the same as the Roman Vulcan) and special patron of the metalworkers whose shops had been concentrated on the slope nearby.

These open-air sites and ruins did not, of course, complete the list of classical remains. There were others—the Roman market with its triple entrance, the middle gate being for chariots and carts, and the eight-sided Tower of the Winds (which had once had a weather-vane and a water-clock), the monument of Lysicrates, commemorating a successful production in the theatre festival, and several more. Then there were the various museums, in which statues and stone-carvings were kept safe from further damage. There were bronzes, too, and red and black vases, with delicately painted figures.

‘It’s rather exciting’, said Nicola, ‘seeing the real thing that you’ve always seen in school-books, ever since you can remember.’

One day they went to another museum which had nothing to do with classical Greece. This was the Benaki Museum, housed in a big mansion just off Kolonaki Square, in the most fashionable quarter, where the foreign embassies were all situated. Here they saw a wonderful collection of local Greek costumes, worn by dummy figures in show cases, and illustrating all the different styles which had once been favoured in the various islands and mainland districts.

It brought home to them how strong local feeling had always been among the Greeks. Nicola remembered from her history lessons that Greece had always been split up, in ancient days, into tiny ‘city-states’, each separated from its neighbours by high mountain ridges or a stretch of sea. Even today, when Greece was a united modern state, there was keen rivalry between regions. Macedonians, Athenians, Cretans . . . all were brimming with local patriotism. Martin’s father had already come across this streak in the Greek character. As a newspaper man he saw a good deal of what went on behind the scenes, and he admitted himself astounded at the extent local politics came into every question. Even the verdict in a beauty contest, he told them, had caused a terrible rumpus—the winner had come from the same island as a certain member of the government, and there had been a rumour of favouritism.

‘Shall we see any of these lovely costumes actually being worn?’ asked Mrs Wharton.

‘I doubt it’, said her husband, ‘unless we go to some special

festival—say, to a folk-dance gathering. It's like most other countries, the national costumes are laid away in the cupboard now, they're not practical enough for modern life.'

'You mean, we shan't even see any men in these natty little ballet skirts?'

'Oh, the *fustanella* is still worn a bit—we'll probably see an old shepherd in one when we go around the country. But we needn't wait till then. I can show you one when we leave here.'

When they came out of the Benaki Museum he took them down past the royal palace, where the Evzones, or Greek Highlanders, were on guard. Very dashing they looked in their white pleated kilts and dark boleros, their white woollen leggings and Turkish slippers with pompoms.

'They may *look* like ballet-dancers', said Mr Wharton, 'but they're splendid soldiers. Terribly tough.'

'Ballet-dancers *are* tough', Nicola pointed out. 'So it isn't any insult to the Evzones.'

'True enough.'

All this sightseeing was spread over a month or more, so that they had time to absorb what they were seeing. Meanwhile, normal life went on—school, an occasional picnic and swim, strolls in the park among the orange-groves, long cold drinks and ices at open-air cafés while the gay pageant of Athenian life passed to and fro, an occasional visit to the cinema. . . . Mostly it was the ordinary American films they saw, but once the Mavrakis took them to an amusing Greek comedy called *Windfall in Athens*, all about a lottery-ticket which a girl had had stolen from her while she was bathing. It was great fun seeing the places they knew on the screen, and, with whispered explanations from Jinny and Andreas, they were able to understand the story. Not many Greek films were made. The cost was too high for small nations.

\* \* \*

One Sunday there was a visit to Anna's home.

Anna's family lived in a little village in the hills, looking northwards across the straits to the island of Euboea. Though not very far from Athens the place was difficult to reach by bus or train, so that she did not go home very often.

She was delighted when Mr Wharton announced that he had

been offered the loan of a car for the following Sunday, and that, if she liked, they could easily plan their drive to fit in with her visit home, so giving her more time with her parents and saving her a tiresome journey.

But there must be no question of a picnic, Anna insisted, pink with pleasure. Her family would be honoured to entertain 'her Englishmen' in their simple home. They would be deeply hurt if the Whartons would not accept their hospitality.

So they got off, in good time, that Sunday morning, with Anna looking very smart and pretty in her new summer dress and nylons. It would never have done, obviously, for the daughter who had gone to work in the city to appear in her native village in anything but the best.

That day the children got a glimpse of a typical Greek home. It was very different from the luxury flat of the Mavrakis in Kolonaki.

It was a two-storey house, the walls whitewashed and the roof of red-brown tiles, the window-shutters blue and a vine-trellis shading the door. An outside staircase went up the side of the house. One or two outhouses stood round forming a tiny yard, which was almost roofed over by the foliage of a plane-tree which rose in the middle.

Anna's father, George Sarandopoulou, was reading a newspaper in the shade by the door. He leapt up as he heard the car coming. A smiling, weather-tanned farmer of about 50, he was arrayed for this occasion in a spotless white shirt and a dark suit which had seen better days but which had been carefully brushed and pressed. In a moment the car seemed to be surrounded by smiling, welcoming people—Anna's plump, aproned mother, her tall shy brothers who helped her father with the sheep and the olive-crop, her twinkling giggling little sister, and even her grandparents, who had come down from their own cottage to join the family reunion. Grandfather Sarandopoulou was like a patch-work Santa Claus—he had just the right sort of white whiskers and kindly eyes, though his trousers were of faded blue cotton with big khaki patches where the knees had worn through. Grandma had a wonderful air of dignity, which neither her eighty years nor her poverty could diminish. She looked rather mediaeval in her dark head-dress, a kind of scarf brought down on both sides



of her face and wrapped round her chin. And she actually held a distaff in her right hand and a spindle in her left, the distaff being a cleft stick loosely heaped about with raw wool, and the spindle being the bar or pin on which the yarn was twisted and wound. Though—whether out of respect to the Sabbath or to the guests—Grandma did no spinning while the Whartons were there.

Dinner was served on a big trestle-table, covered with a check cloth, in the cool shade of the plane-tree. Nobody could talk much English except Anna, who acted as interpreter, but the family plied Mr Wharton with questions when they found that he could speak their own language.

Afterwards the visitors were shown over the house.

It was very simple, without much furniture, but everything was neat and clean.

The door opened straight into the living-room. At the far end was the kitchen with its burnished pots and pans on their hooks, winking back the red glow of the charcoal in the stove. There was an icon on the wall, with a tiny light burning in front of a picture of St George. After the icon, the most treasured possession seemed to be a loudly ticking alarm-clock.

The outside staircase led up, through the rustling green shadows of the overhanging tree, to three small bedrooms. There were curtains at the windows, one or two mats and sheepskin rugs, and—Anna proudly displayed in her sister's room which she shared when at home—a wardrobe with a long mirror, just like the ones in Athens! There was no bathroom. What use was a bathroom when all water had to be carried in square petrol tins from a spring further up the road—and when the family wash had to be bundled onto a donkey and taken, rather as in Nausicaa's day, to a stream half a mile distant? There was no electricity, either, but as soon as it reached the village her father was determined to have it.

Anna's pride in her home was more understandable when, before starting home for Athens, they gave her grandparents the thrill of a car-ride back to their own little cottage. This was bare and simple indeed—the ground-floor was used as a store and above it was just one all-purpose room, with beds fitted into each corner. Here her father had lived until his marriage. They could see now how splendidly Papa had got on in the world.

## CHAPTER IX

### UP IN THE MOUNTAINS

So the summer wore on—and suddenly everybody in the class began to talk about the trip to Delphi, and who was going to climb Parnassus?

Mrs Wharton had her doubts about the mountaineering part of the trip.

‘Are you sure you’ll manage it?’ she asked Nicola anxiously.

‘Of *course*, Mummy! Remember how I walked with Daddy and you in the Lakes!’

‘This isn’t the Lakes. It isn’t England. How high is Parnassus—over eight thousand feet, isn’t it? That’s twice as high as you’ve ever been—three times, more like—’

‘But we shall be much higher when we start, Mrs Wharton’, said Martin, ‘and we don’t do it all in the same day—we make a camp—’

‘Camp? Who’s going to carry all the stuff, in this blazing heat? It’ll be all Nicky can do to—’

‘There are going to be mules, Mummy—’

‘And if any of the girls find it’s too much, they can ride part of the way—’

‘And anyhow, Mummy, we shan’t walk in the hottest part of the afternoon—’

‘And the school’s done it before, Mrs Wharton! Dr Collins and his wife are in charge, and there’ll be local guides with the mules—’

‘Do let me go, Mummy! Do say “yes”!’

‘All right, on your own head be it—or more likely on your own aching feet—’

‘Oh, bless you, Mummy! Thanks a million! Oh, *hooray*!’

As a prelude to the ascent of Parnassus, there was to be a visit to Delphi, the site of the famous oracle of Apollo, which lay on the lower slopes of the great mountain, and to a performance by the National Theatre Group in the open-air theatre above the ruined shrine. Altogether, a complete bus-load of their school-friends enrolled for the trip, though half of them (being too young

or too lazy) were not going to make the climb. The Mavraki twins, agile and tough as a couple of goats, were in the Parnassus party and had promised to look after Nicola and Martin—a promise which drew the blackest of glares from him, kindly meant though it had been.

• It was a beautiful bus-ride—‘as good’, said Nicola afterwards, ‘as hours and hours on a switchback—only the scenery was so much better than a fun-fair.’

She was glad that bus-sickness never troubled her when she saw the driver distributing little paper-bags to all his passengers. Apparently this was quite a common procedure on long-distance buses in Greece, and she could imagine that, with some people, it would not be an idle formality. One or two hair-pin bends were all right—two or three dizzy drops should worry nobody—but when they were almost continuous for half an hour at a time, not every stomach would remain under its owner’s control.

However, the drive was completed without catastrophe. Two or three people turned an interesting olive-green colour, and half a dozen others became much less talkative as the journey wore on, but nothing worse happened.

Their road took them out along the Sacred Way, past Daphni and the smoking chimneys of Eleusis, and then grinding up the lower slopes of Mount Cithaeron.

‘We’re out of Attica now’, said Andreas as the bus plunged down the other side. ‘This is Boeotia!’

Nicola remembered—the Athenians had always laughed at the Boeotians, the people over the mountain. They had been regarded as dull-witted, clodhopping farmers. Well, farmers they might well have been—and still seemed to be. This land looked better than that round Athens. This was the plain of Thebes, always one of the fertile areas in Greece and never more so than now. Earlier in the term they had been given a geography lesson on the Lake Copais project, a vast drainage scheme which the Greek Government had recently taken over from the private British company which had previously been running it for many years. Skilful engineering had, bit by bit, turned a shallow, marshy, useless lake into thousands of acres of fertile land, where cotton, corn, and other crops could be grown. Such a scheme had been especially valuable in a country

like Greece where so much of the land-area was bare rock or the thinnest of pasture, and where every square yard of good soil was treasured.

That was brought home to her even more vividly as the drive went on, when they climbed back into the hills. The dry hillsides carried little else but flocks of sheep and goats, drifting across them like shadows. But here and there, wherever the narrowest ledge of flatter, deeper soil allowed, there was a pocket-handkerchief-sized patch of corn. So, too, with any scrap of longer, lusher grass that could possibly be made into hay for winter-feed—what at home would have been left as roadside weeds, untouched or sprayed with weed-killer, was here being painstakingly cut, loaded on donkeys, and carried home as though it were a rich harvest.

The saying was true enough: 'Poverty and Greece are sisters'. Yet how contented those brown wrinkled men and women looked, how serene and good-natured as they straightened their backs and flashed smiles at the waving bus-load of boys and girls who rushed by!

First, though, there was the green and golden plain of Thebes to be crossed, where farming was more rewarding and modern equipment was not unknown.

To the right stretched the rich flat fields which had once been Lake Copais, to the left rose the rocky slopes of a great mountain *massif*, the highest part of which was Mount Helicon, once sacred to the Muses. Nicola bent her head and pressed her cheek against the bus window, trying to catch a glimpse of the summit, but Jinny said:

'I don't think you can see Helicon from just here—it's right back, right against the sea. You must have passed it on the other side when you came in the ship, up the Gulf of Corinth, but I expect you were asleep at the time.'

The bus stopped for a few minutes at a small town called Livadia. A man came forward with a charcoal brazier and little skewers of grilled lamb. Some of the party patronized him, others preferred to buy oranges. For one reason or another, everyone seemed to be licking sticky fingers.

'Look there, Nicky!' said Martin suddenly, pointing upwards.

'It's only a stork's nest', said Andreas. 'Don't you have them at home?'

'Oh, no!' cried Nicola.

The nest was made of quite large sticks and was built against the chimney-stack. The stork itself was standing on one leg, gripping the ridge of tiles. It looked very fine against the blue sky with its plumage of deep black and snowy white, and the vivid red of its leg and bill. After surveying the children for a few moments it suddenly took off and climbed in a slow, sweeping circle above the houses.

'We have lots of them', said Andreas. 'But in the winter they fly off to Egypt.'

They got into the bus again and started off. They were leaving Boeotia now and climbing over the hills into Phocis. The broad plain slipped behind them. The road became more and more dramatic in its bends and gradients. Andreas said they were now on the lower slopes of Parnassus itself.

Parnassus—as they would discover tomorrow—was much higher than Helicon; 8,064 feet compared with 5,738. Parnassus, too, had been sacred to the Muses.

'Arachova!' announced Dr Collins as the bus wheezed up the road into a large village. There was a chorus of interested comment and everybody peered out eagerly. They were coming back to Arachova to spend the night.

'I s'pose Delphi itself is too crowded, with all the people coming to see the play?' asked Martin.

'Perhaps. But the chief reason is that we shall save two hours' climbing tomorrow. Arachova is over one thousand metres above the sea—as you reckon it, that is more than three thousand feet. Delphi is much lower. You see, we are going downhill now.'

\* \* \*

Delphi was incredible. It was easy to see why the ancients had regarded it as a specially holy place and why they had come as pilgrims, from every corner of the Mediterranean, to consult the priestess of Apollo.

The road snaked its way along the flank of Parnassus, and there was just room for the modern village to squeeze itself in as a row of houses on either side.

Above, the mountain soared into the sky. At the entrance to the village there were sheer cliffs, the shining white limestone rocks known as the Phedriades.

Below the road, almost as steeply but not quite, the world went tumbling down into the deep green wooded gorge of the Pleistos. They could see the ravine zigzagging down to a patch of blue sea, oddly smooth and level in all that hard and jagged landscape. Down there was the little port of Itca—they could have come to Delphi that way by steamer from Piraeus, through the Corinthian Canal. In ancient days many pilgrims had used the sea-route, and that was the way Apollo himself was said to have come for the first time.

The legend was that Delphi had always been a holy place, even before the arrival of the Sun God.

It had been sacred then to the Earth Goddess, who had set a snake-like dragon, the Python, to guard it. Apollo had killed this monster and made the shrine his own, but the priestess had continued to be known as 'the Pythoness'. In historic times she had been a simple peasant woman, chosen from the district. After chewing leaves of sacred laurel and drinking water from a certain spring, she had taken her seat on a stool over a particular crevice in the rocks—and promptly gone into a trance. Learned men still argued about the possibility of some special vapour or natural gas coming up through the crevice, which would have produced this result but nowadays they were inclined to think that the drug-like effect of the leaves would have been enough, combined with her emotional state, worked up by the suggestion of the priests. For it was they who really 'ran' the oracle of Delphi. They put the questions submitted by the pilgrims, and then translated appropriate answers out of the unintelligible murmurs of the Pythoness. Clever, well-informed men of the world themselves, they had become pastmasters in the art of giving answers with double meanings, so that, however the future turned out, the god would seem to have been right.

One of the best examples of this had been when King Croesus had asked advice on the expedition he planned against the Persians. The oracle answered that, if he advanced across the River Halys, 'he would destroy a mighty empire'. Thus encouraged

he went ahead with his campaign; the empire he destroyed, however, was not Persia but the one he was building up for himself in Asia Minor.

Mr Wharton had warned Nicola and Martin not to dismiss the oracle of Delphi as a mere superstition, an ingenious racket worked by cunning priests.

Delphi had been a very useful institution in ancient Greece. With the people split up into separate, warring states, it had given them a centre where they could meet in peace. It had been a kind of Geneva or Lake Success—and a great deal more. Not only had statesmen and ambassadors flocked there but business men, athletes, and mere holiday-makers. It had been a clearing-house for information of every kind, a central bank where states could deposit treasure under the protection of Apollo, and a place for sporting and theatrical festivals.

Today, looking at the mountainside littered with ruins, Nicola found it a little hard to imagine this quiet, flower-spangled slope as a citadel of shining temples, echoing to chariot-wheels, ringing with thousands of voices. Later in the afternoon, when the tourist crowds began to arrive, there was no need to imagine the voices—but the scene remained wild and mountainous and awe-inspiring. The cars and buses, the binoculars and cameras and rucksacks, the exclamations in German and French and English and American, did not help to recreate the built-up, populous Delphi of Apollo's time.

There had been so much of it. A great temple of the god, with, at the western end, the inner shrine where the priestess had crouched on her stool and moaned out her 'prophecies'—the exact spot was untraceable, for earthquake and war had played havoc with the site; then, in the precincts of the temple, a host of other shrines and treasuries, belonging to the various Greek states, one of which—the Treasury of the Athenians—had been restored and now stood out with its Doric columns erect amid all the prostrate jumble of the other ruins, conveying some slight idea of what the whole place must once have looked like; the Sacred Way, a zigzag ramp paved with oblong blocks, by which the pilgrims and the animals for sacrifice had climbed the slope; the remains of the gymnasium, down below the modern road, close

to the waters of the Castalian Spring, where pilgrims had bathed their heads as an act of purification before they entered the sanctuary; the theatre, seating five thousand people, high on the hillside above the temple; and, on an airy mountain shelf above even the theatre, the oblong stadium, over two hundred yards in length, with the grooved stones still visible where the runners had set their feet while waiting for the starter's signal.

When they had clambered all over the ruins, and seen the museum with its world-famous sculptures—especially the tall figure of the renowned 'charioteer of Delphi'—the school party were more than ready for tea on the terrace of a hotel, overhanging the gorge of the Pleistos. Nicola found it was a good opportunity to drink in not only the tea but the details of that superb view—the wooded ravine with its river far below, tumbling and spuming down to the placid blue of the Corinthian Gulf, and the other mountains rising steeply opposite. One (Andreas said it was called Mount Kirphis) went up like the gable-end of a giant's house. To and fro across it, like a thin pencilled line, climbed a mule-track. Slowly, ever so slowly, two figures were moving up it, leading a donkey. Where were they going? To what remote village, unvisited by the tourist? Somehow those little figures toiling up the mountain with their donkey seemed to personify modern Greece, the land of innumerable villages tucked away in the folds of the brown hills.

In the evening they got a revelation of ancient Greece. Sitting high up in the open theatre, with a full moon swimming up into the darkening sky, they watched the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. It was acted in classical Greek, but the story was well known and the play itself had been explained to them beforehand. They knew the doom prepared by the revengeful Queen for her husband when he returned from the siege of Troy, they knew what the mad princess, Cassandra, was trying to warn him against as she stepped from the chariot, they knew just what had happened when the curtains of the palace-doorway parted at the end and showed the Queen, axe in hand, standing over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. It was rather like watching an opera—though one missed a lot by not understanding all the words, one got the general drift and could enjoy the spectacle. How amazing, Nicola



whispered to Martin, that such a play could have been written so long ago—in 458 B.C.!

\* \* \*

Altogether nine boys and five girls had been accepted for the climb up Parnassus. It was not really a 'climb', Dr Collins cheerfully assured them, but a long, long uphill tramp, with rough scrambling in the later stages. They wouldn't be doing any alpine stuff, but it was definitely too hard a trip for the younger ones.

It was a short night's sleep they got at Arachova, for it was late when the bus took them up to the village after the play and very early when Mrs Collins appeared at each bedside (they had been accommodated in small groups in various cottages) and told them that the guides were waiting in the street.

The guides were loading the mules by lantern-light. There were rolled-up blankets (for it would be cold for their bivouac on the heights), picnic gear including a stove, and even cans of drinking water. Poets might talk about the 'springs of Parnassus', but there were none on the upper slopes.

There were three men and three mules. Or rather one man and two boys, for it later appeared that burly George, with his magnificent black moustache and his sheepskin coat, was the father of the others, Tino (17 and very dashing in a bright American shirt) and Sophocles (15, silent but smiling shyly all the time). George spoke a little English, Tino a little American, and Sophocles was just thoughtful.

Five o'clock was striking from the bell-tower of Arachova when the party began to file up the zigzag stony track. It was a stiff ascent, and they were still dull with sleep—or the lack of it. No one talked very much in those first miles as they trudged along, one behind another. Nicola was just behind the mule which Sophocles was leading. She knew only one thing about mules—their reputed tendency to kick. She took good care not to get too close. She had already made up her mind, privately, that she would have to be very, very tired indeed before accepting a ride.

'Mules are all right', Andy assured her airily.

'Oh, I'm sure they are.' But she wasn't.

After an hour or two's climb they reached a sheltered little glen where there were some huts. A herdsman stood watching them

approach, shading his eyes against the brightness of the rising sun.

'*Kaly-maira!*' he called, his voice vibrant in the clear mountain air. And, in reply, they all wished him good-day. '*Kaly-maira! Kaly-maira!*' For simple things like that, Martin's Greek was now as good as anyone's . . .

For a time now the path went through pinewoods. Martin and Nicola found the shade welcome, for the sun was rapidly growing in strength. Over one stretch the trail hugged the edge of a steep gorge. There was a stony stream-bed at the bottom, but neither a sound nor a sight of water. This was midsummer all right!

Gradually the trees, which had never been very dense, thinned out and finally ceased. The mountainside stretched in front, bare and baked. Nothing grew but fine, wiry blades of scorched grass, like bristles standing out against some gaunt and sunburnt cheek-bone. To everyone's relief Dr Collins announced that they would halt here, have lunch in the last patches of shade, and rest until the heat of the afternoon was over.

Now that they were above the woods they could get a really extensive view, right across the Corinthian Gulf to the piled-up mountains of the Peloponnese. At home, on so hot a morning, the distance would have been veiled in haze. But in the clear dry air of Greece—'pellucid' was the lovely word Mr Wharton always used to describe it—the peaks and ridges stood out with all the definition of a sculpture lying almost within reach of their hands.

They were seeing for the first time, in panorama, that other, southerly, half of Greece on which they had not yet set foot—the Greece of Sparta and the Olympic Games, Argos the kingdom of that very Agamemnon whose tragedy they had watched in last night's play, and Arcadia, the legendary home of shepherds.

'I must go over that side', vowed Nicola, 'before I leave Greece.'

What with the heat, the long walk and the short night's rest they had had, everyone was quite happy to stretch out and sleep for an hour or two after the picnic meal was over. The tethered mules stamped and flicked away the flies, George and Tino gratefully accepted American cigarettes from Dr Collins, and Sophocles sat with his back against a tree, apart from everybody, and played low, plaintive little airs on a shepherd's pipe.

It was still hot when Dr Collins gave the order to move on again, but the shadows were beginning to lengthen. Soon, as they picked their way up the rocky slopes, there were few shadows but their own. Only, occasionally, a crevice between the heaped boulders or a crag standing higher than the rest made a black patch against the shimmering browns and greys and mauves of the mountainside. Always there was a ridge outlined against the sky, and always, when they got up to it, there was another beyond it, higher still.

Nicola could hardly believe it when at last George stopped and flung up an arm, pointing to what looked like just another ridge above them.

'Parnassus!' he cried, beaming back at the long file of climbers, and flashing his teeth.

'Oh, it looks quite near now!' exclaimed Martin.

'It always does', Nicola retorted.

'I don't see why we shouldn't go up tonight. See the sunset!'

George heard him and shook his head vigorously. 'No, no! The sunrise, that will be better. It is two hours still to the top, and the young ladies would be too tired. And it will be cold—'

'Cold?' hooted Martin. His shirt was clinging to his skin, his face was streaked with dust and sweat.

'To sleep', said George firmly. 'You will see. Even here, it will be cold tonight.'

He led the way forward to a sheltered hollow. Blackened stones and ashes showed where previous parties had lit their fires.

'We stop here', George announced. 'We have supper. We sleep. Then we wake early, very early. More early than today—'

There was a general groan.

The guide laughed. 'But yes, we must! For the sunrise! And then we go home—all downhill! You will like, yes!'

Nicola was not sorry to sit down. And, truth to tell, Martin was quite satisfied to leave the final stage of the ascent until the next morning. He could not remember when he had last walked so far. The climb, being steeply uphill nearly all the way, had found out some of his leg-muscles that had not been exercised for a long time.

Everyone felt better when the kettle had boiled and the can-

opener had been set to work. Forewarned that there would be no wood at this altitude, only dried grass, the boys had each brought up a little supply of dead branches and fir-cones which they had collected during the afternoon halt. Spirit-stoves were fine for the practical business of tea-making, but all agreed that a camp-fire was absolutely essential to sit round.

And how glad they were of it, as the sun dropped down and a cool evening breeze began to whisper across the mountainside! Most of the party were draping themselves in their blankets, like Red Indians, long before they lay down to sleep.

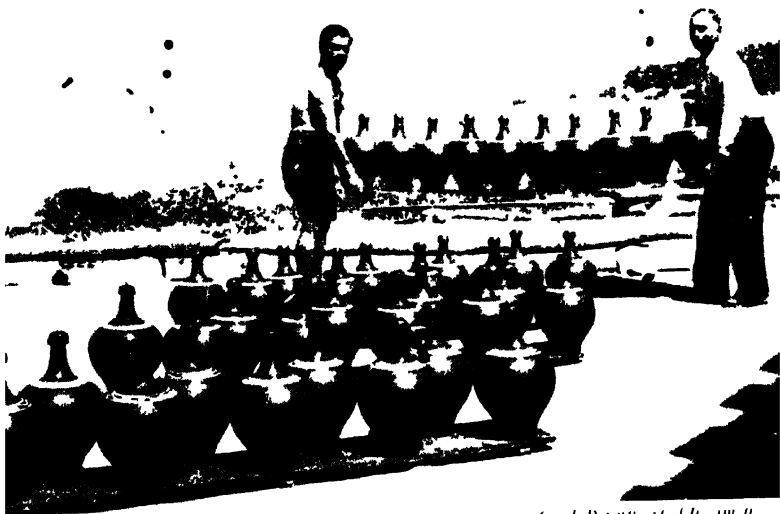
The ground was hard. It was all very well, grumbled Martin, being taught to scrape out a hollow for your hip-bone—where *he* was lying, he needed not a knife but a pneumatic drill! But gradually the whispering and groaning ceased, and as the red glow faded from the ashes all was quiet in the camp.

Nicola woke again just after midnight. The moon had risen and for a moment she lay wondering where she was, until glancing round at her huddled schoolmates she remembered. Of course, she was sleeping out on Parnassus! She was actually here, on the sacred mountain of Apollo and the Nine Muses! The lines of the Matthew Arnold poem came back to her as she lay there, her head pillowed on her clasped hands:

*'In the moonlight the shepherds,  
Soft lull'd by the rills,  
Lie wrapt in their blankets,  
Asleep on the hills.'*

How appropriate! Except that up here there wasn't a trickle of water—only the mysterious come-and-go rustlings of the wind. If she stayed awake long enough would *she* catch a glimpse of the poet's vision?

*'What forms arc these coming  
So white through the gloom?  
What garments out-glistening  
The gold-flower'd broom?'*



*C. J. D. FINE ARTS, RHODES*

ABOVE: Potters in the Dodecanese Islands. BELOW: Rhodes. The famous street of the Knights with its massive Gothic buildings, almost like Oxford colleges.





*One of the five stone lions which guard the sanctuary of Apollo on the island of Delos*

*'Tis Apollo comes leading  
His choir, the Nine.  
—The leader is fairest,  
But all are divine.*

*• They are lost in the hollows!  
They stream up again!  
What seeks on this mountain  
The glorified train?*

Nicola never reached the last verse about 'the day in his hotness, the strife with the palm; the night in her silence, the stars in their calm'. Appropriate though it was, she was already fast asleep again. The next thing she knew was Jinny shaking her in the chilly darkness before the dawn.

They left Tino and Sophocles to clear up the camp-site and stay with the mules. From this point the ascent was a stiff scramble over a litter of boulders and loose slabs. Though it was mid-summer, occasional patches of snow gleamed whitely through the gloom. In the last hollow, before the top, there was a pool, and in the growing light they saw that it carried a partial skin of ice. Most of the year, said George, it was quite frozen over.

Curved round the pool was a jagged little ridge, rising to two distinct peaks. One, the slightly higher, was sacred to Apollo, the other to Dionysus. They scrambled up to the higher one, which was marked with a wooden cross, just in time to see the red rim of the sun appear above the eastern hills.

'Gosh!' said Martin huskily. 'What a view!'

In front of them there were precipices falling giddily, down and down to the green valley of the Cephissus river. Beyond rose the main mountain-mass of Northern Greece, stretching across from Thrace into Epirus.

'There's Thermopylac', said Dr Collins. 'where the hills come down to the sea. That long island is Euboea. And, look! Right in the far distance—where the sun is shining on the snow—that's Mount Olympus, must be! Mount Olympus, home of all the gods!'

Martin nudged Nicola. 'I s'pose', he whispered teasingly, 'you won't be happy till you've been there too?'

## CHAPTER X

### A TRAIN TO SALONIKA

THE summer was slipping by. Byron broke up for the holidays—schoolwork in that heat was unthinkable. For Nicola it was good-bye. Next term would find her back at her own school in England. It would be lovely to see all her old friends, of course, but it was sad to think that only a few weeks of her Greek visit remained.

'There's so much to see', she lamented to Martin's father. 'I'm so tired of people saying, "Athens isn't typical, Athens isn't Greece". Daddy can't possibly take us away for another week or two.'

Of course, there had been other, shorter, excursions besides the trip to Delphi. Once Mr Mavraki had taken them on a Sunday drive to Cape Sunium, the south-easterly tip of Attica, where they had bathed and had a picnic among the ruined columns of Poseidon's temple, most dramatically and suitably placed (for a sea-god's shrine) on tussocky moorland cliffs looking out across the dazzling blue expanse of the Aegean. They had been to Marathon (the site of the battle, not the modern reservoir), but there was really nothing to see there, and they had crossed by the ferry to Salamis, but here again the island was hardly worthy of its immortal name. And several times Mr Murry had borrowed the office car to take both families swimming, for most of the good beaches were anything from fifteen to thirty miles from the city. There had been no disappointment in any of these beaches—they all had beautiful clean sands and fragrant pinewoods coming close down to the water's edge. As the Aegean was part of the Mediterranean Sea, there was of course no tide to worry about. Any time was bathing time.

'I'm just thinking', said Mr Murry slowly, when Nicola voiced her little grumble. He had taken rather a fancy to his son's friend.

'What, Dad?' demanded Martin.

'My Salonika job next week . . . Now I wonder . . .

Mr Murry had already told Martin about the story he had to cover, which would mean going north for a day or two. In the first world war Salonika and the country near it had been the



scene of a fiercely fought campaign. Thousands of British and Allied troops lay buried there, and many surviving veterans of those days were still members of an association. They kept in touch with the local Greeks who had been their friends in those far-off days, and, out of their funds, they made gifts to one particular school in Salonika and one particular village outside the town which they had 'adopted'. Owing to the expense of the long journey from Britain, it was very seldom that any of them were able to come out and see their Greek friends or visit the cemeteries in which their comrades lay, but it so happened that one of their members, a retired brigadier, was even now on his way out to Greece to visit the adopted school and village and hand over some further gifts.

The affair had possibilities as a 'human story', and as things were quiet in Athens, with Parliament in recess and the Royal Family away at their summer palace in the hills, Mr Murry had decided to play it up as a good illustration of Anglo-Greek friendship. He was going to meet the brigadier in Athens and travel up to Salonika with him in the train.

'It's a twelve-hour run', he mused, with a wry expression. 'Only a sixty-five minute hop by 'plane! Still, the old boy prefers the train, and it'll give me more time to get him talking. Anyhow, we can take the 'plane coming back'—'

'We?' echoed Martin eagerly.

'Yes, you—and Nicky, too, if her parents will let her. Give her a glimpse of northern Greece—'

Nicola's eyes were shining. Then her face fell. 'I don't know', she said doubtfully. 'I'll ask . . . but it's a bit awkward. The fare—especially if we *flew* back—'

'You don't have to worry about that. I've got an idea—a new angle on the story. This adopted school . . . We want *our* younger generation represented, as well as theirs . . . Nicky would improve any photograph—wish I could say the same for Martin! If you don't mind a bit of publicity, Nicky, I think we could fix this jaunt out of the expense-account.'

\* \* \*

The old brigadier was, Nicola declared, 'a pet', and it was hard to believe that his mild blue eyes had ever blazed with the fire

of battle. But there was no doubt about his V.C. or the string of other decorations he had won. He was a shy, modest man, and it would have taxed all Mr Murry's journalistic skill to get him talking. Nicola more than earned her expenses by her artless questions. With her, the kindly old soldier was at ease. He talked to her and Martin as the train rolled northwards—and Mr Murry listened with half-closed eyes, pretending not to be interested.

This was the most important railway-line in Greece, because it was the one link with the main European system. Through Salonika one could get on to the Simplon-Orient Express. That was how the brigadier was going home, he said—by train through Yugoslavia, Italy, Switzerland, and France. He was very fond of railway-travel, he said, which was perhaps just as well.

At first some of the country was familiar to the children. They found themselves passing through Thebes and Livadia, and saw Parnassus to the left, towering up from the green plain. Then the line swung more and more northwards. The Pindus Mountains now formed a continuous wall on their left, and somewhere to the right was the sea, but it was not very near and they caught only rare glimpses of it, because of the way the coast bulged out in great peninsulas.

'This is the traditional invasion-route into Greece from the North', said the brigadier, interrupting his flow of personal memories. 'The Persians came this way, so did the Nazis in '41.' He stood up and peered through the window at a distant gleam of sea. 'If that's the Gulf of Lamia—and I think it must be—Thermopylac is somewhere down there, between the hills and the beach. Did you know the New Zealanders held it against the Nazis, just as bravely as the Spartans did against Xerxes and his hordes? Though I don't think the pass is so narrow as it was in olden times. The coast changes a lot, you know—silts up.'

After the little town of Lamia the train climbed doggedly over a mountain-ridge and came down, past the shores of Lake Daoukli, into the spreading plains of Thessaly. First to right, then to left, the hills drew away into the distance. The train rattled forward between golden cornfields, for Thessaly was called 'the granary of Greece'. All the richest farmland in Greece was in the north—first here in Thessaly, then in Macedonia (where they would be

when they reached Salonika), and finally in Thrace, the long thin territory stretching eastward from Macedonia to Turkey, hemmed in between the Bulgarian frontier and the sea.

'Is that tobacco?' asked Martin, pointing to a crop of green broad-leaved plants which looked familiar from pictures he had seen.

'Yes', said the brigadier. 'You'll see lots of it from now on. Macedonia grows the best in the country, and it's a very important crop. It's the Greeks' number one export, in fact.'

'Even more than currants?' asked Nicola.

'About twice as important, I'm told. Currants come next. And the other things a long way behind—wine and olive oil and figs and sultanas. The trouble is, both tobacco and currants sometimes suffer from over-production, and then the price drops in the world-market, and our poor friends at Salonika find they've done a hard year's work on their tobacco-fields for a very small reward.'

Most Greek farms were very small, he explained. Ten acres was about the average. Nearly all were run by peasant-owners and their families. There was little scope for hired hands, expensive machinery, or new scientific methods—though, of course, progress could be made by the use of fertilizers, new strains in stock-breeding, and so forth. Generally speaking, however, Greek farming followed the age-old traditions of the Near East.

Yes, it was quite true, they were passing a good many fields of wheat and barley. But Greece could not sell these crops abroad, she could only supply two-thirds of her own needs. With more than half her total area barren, there just was not enough land for everything. If a lot of that land was devoted to tobacco it was simply so that Greece could export it and pay her way in the world.

They had not seen any mines, had they? No. Greece had hardly any minerals of importance. Oh, there *were* some minerals—some iron ore and lead, zinc and sulphur, and so on—but no coal and now atom-power to take its place, as in a country like Norway, so that Greece could never become a big industrial nation.

'Thank goodness!' interjected Nicola. 'I'd hate to see factories everywhere.'

So, as Greek manufacturing was confined to a few light

industries, such as carpet-making, the Greeks had to pay their way in the world by other methods. The city Greek was an enterprising business man. He handled a vast volume of the trade between other countries. His foreign investments brought money flowing into Greece. So did the earnings of the Greek shipping companies, sailing the seven seas with the freight and passengers of other nations.

'Oh, yes', said Martin, 'there's the Greek Line across the Atlantic—Southampton to New York. I've seen their advertisements.'

Far up in the hills to the left, said the brigadier, were the world-famous monasteries of Meteora—the children must have seen photographs of them, the buildings clinging incredibly to the sheer face of the cliffs, almost like bird's nests? Visitors used to be hauled up in a net, he believed, though nowadays steps had been cut in the rock. Only a handful of monks lived up there, now, though at one time there had been hundreds.

'Some day', said Nicola wistfully, and filed the Meteora monasteries in her memory. She would visit them when she came to Greece again—as she was quite determined to do.

The train now stopped at Larissa. This town and the nearby port of Volo were the chief places in Thessaly; they were about as big as a smallish county town at home. Larissa stood about a mile from its railway-station, so they had only a distant view of its rooftops.

But who, just then, wanted to look at towns? Certainly not Nicola. For the mountains were closing in again—and mountains with immortal names. Pelion, Ossa, and straight ahead the snow-capped mass of Olympus itself, where Zeus and Hera had once sat upon their cloud-wreathed thrones, with all the other gods and goddesses around them, feasting on nectar and ambrosia. A majestic mountain it looked too, with its upper slopes of bare, light-coloured rock rising from forest to the topmost point, close on ten thousand feet above the sea. It was well worthy of its fame in myth and legend.

Soon the train plunged into a narrow defile between the steep, rocky sides of Olympus and Ossa. This was the no less famous Vale of Tempe—though really the English word 'vale' was all

wrong, the children agreed, because it made Tempe sound tame. The place was anything but tame. Even now, in summer, the River Peneus came racing down, grey and turbid, frothing here and there into rapids. Laurel thickets and plane-trees shaded its banks, giving place now and then to small green glades, and above, clinging to the crags, hung pines and oakwoods. Jagged remnants of masonry showed where, down the ages, forts had stood to defend the narrow way. Sometimes the two mountains edged so close together that there was barely room for river, road, and railway to squeeze through.

The gorge ran for about five miles. At the far end was the sea. The river plunged into the Gulf of Salonika and the railway-line continued northwards, closely hugging the coastline. Soon the brigadier was pointing out the far-off city, rising across the blue waters of the gulf. The train made a wide sweep round, and, with a sigh of escaping steam, slid contentedly into the station. They were at Salonika, second city of Greece and first city of Macedonia, the homeland of Alexander the Great.

\* \* \*

Salonika—Thessalonika, as the Greeks called it—had in fact been named after Alexander's sister, and, as the town was not founded until some years after his death, it had no relics to show of the classical Greek period. Not that it was lacking in history—had not St Paul preached here and addressed two Epistles 'to the Thessalonians'? Salonika had been great in Roman times, and was still rich in Byzantine churches, but Nicola and Martin had already agreed to give these a miss. Their time was going to be so short, and architecture needed someone like Nicola's father to make it interesting.

Much of the old town had vanished in the course of various wars and disasters, such as the great fire of 1917. Even so, there were enough Turkish-style houses and one-time mosques (the latter converted back into Christian churches or into shops and cinemas) to remind them that Salonika had been Turkish within living memory. In fact the elderly waiter at the hotel told them how he had seen the first Greek troops march into the town in October, 1912. Ten years later, the second and less successful war with Turkey had flooded Salonika with penniless refugees from Asia

Minor. . . . Yes, he admitted, shaking his bald head, he had seen many changes, many terrible things, in this town. But now things were looking up again.

They should come to the Trade Fair in September! Oh, but they really should! It was always a great occasion. The hotel would be crowded with foreign business representatives. Many British firms were exhibiting. America too—oh, nearly a dozen countries.

Glowing with local pride, he claimed that Salonika was a much better business centre and port than Piraeus. Where did Piraeus lead to? Only to Athens. But Salonika was an international port. Here the shipping of the Mediterranean could connect with the railway-line across Europe. Yugoslavs and Bulgarians depended on this outlet for their trade.

'Typical Greek', commented the brigadier with a kindly smile when he had hustled away. 'Tremendous feeling for his own district. Jealous as a cat of any other. But watch him if foreigners dare to criticize the other places! Then you'll see him up in arms. Grand fellows!'

They stayed only for a day and a night in Salonika. They went to the boys' school, where there was quite a ceremony, for, though it was the summer holidays, nearly all the staff and pupils had gathered to welcome the brigadier. There were flags and flowers and press photographers, and Martin and Nicola had to pose in some of the pictures. The brigadier went all over the buildings, so that he could report to his association at home what good use had been made of their donations.

Then, after lunch, they were all driven out to see the village which the association had adopted. Here things were less formal. It was harvest-time, and they walked through the fields with the priest, the school-teacher, and local officials, only pausing for friendly handshakes and brief conversations. Some of the older people remembered the brigadier—though they called him 'the Captain'—and they asked eagerly after other officers and men who had once been billeted in their houses.

'Why', said the brigadier, as a smiling woman in her fifties hurried forward from her doorway and shyly introduced herself, 'you must be Elena Agaliotis? Of course I remember! You and your two sisters!' He turned to Nicola. 'She was not much older

than you in those days. But her family were so good to us—we used to have some fun then, didn't we, Elena, eh?

The old soldier and the peasant-woman were laughing in each other's faces, pouring out a stream of questions.

'What happened to your elder sister—'

'What happened to the soldier with the red hair, that you all called "Jock"—'

'Is Kalokerinos still in the land of the living—'

'The tall boy who was wounded in the arm—a corporal, I think—'

The meeting had its sadness. Too often, Elena shook her head. Many of the names mentioned brought a shadow to her face. Another war had swept through the village since then. Enemy occupation. Guerrilla fighting. Many of the people were no longer alive.

The brigadier was tactful. He changed the subject. 'Do you remember', he laughed, 'when we moved out, Jimmy and I wanted to give your mother a present? And we just hadn't a thing. In the end, all we could get hold of—positively the only thing!—was a tea-towel from the mess. Yet she thanked us as if—'

'Come, please!' said the peasant-woman quickly. There were tears in her eyes. She motioned them to enter the little house. It was poor and bare, but spotlessly clean. She went to a wooden chest, opened it, and rummaged for a moment. 'There', she said softly. And with great dignity she held out a cheap square of material, criss-crossed with thin red lines and printed with the words GLASS CLOTH.

The brigadier gaped. He groped for words. 'By jingo', he said stupidly, 'it *has* worn well!'

Elena looked up at him. In her eyes affection was mixed with a housewife's scorn of mere man's ignorance.

'You do not think my mother would ever have *used* it?' she said gently. And kneeling before the chest, she put it away again with reverent fingers, as though it were some heirloom of priceless lace.

## CHAPTER XI

### BEYOND THE ISTHMUS

ATHENS was empty. At least, that was what people said, fanning themselves in the August heat—but to Martin and Nicola the city looked as full as ever. The trams and buses, the underground railway down to Piraeus, the streets and squares and parks, all seemed crowded.

‘Of course’, said Mr Wharton. ‘That’s because the Athenians *live* out of doors, whenever it’s fine. English people use streets only when they have to get somewhere. To a Greek, the street is his living-room. He doesn’t want to be alone, he hates being alone. He loves crowds and noise.’

Athens was empty only in the same way as London was empty between the fashionable seasons. The well-to-do people had gone to the seaside, and most of the scholars Mr Wharton knew were out of town, either on holiday or excavating. But the rest of the population, the overwhelming majority, went on with their ordinary lives—the innumerable shopkeepers, road-sweepers, dockers, railwaymen, carpenters, stone-masons, and so on. The average Athenian had little money for holidays.

There was nothing, however, to keep Mr Wharton in the city any longer. The family was free now to start a long-planned tour of the South. Martin was going with them. Mr Murry realized that this companionship with the Whartons—and not least with Mr Wharton—was a fine thing for his son.

Martin had been fully consulted when they planned the tour.

‘Can we go to Olympia—where the Olympic Games used to be?’ he asked.

‘I don’t see why not’, said Mr Wharton.

‘I want to see Mycenae’, cried Nicola. ‘And Argos, and Sparta, and Corinth—*all* the places that come into history.’

‘We’ll do our best’, he promised.

‘If only you could have borrowed a car, Daddy!’

Mr Wharton made a face at that. ‘I shouldn’t be very happy with someone else’s car’, he admitted. ‘You mustn’t judge Greek roads by the surfaces round Athens—or by the road to Delphi.



No, we'll manage with trains and buses, thank you very much!'

They started off from Athens in a gay little diesel train which went snaking along the coast past Eleusis and Salamis and Megara, the track following the line of the cliffs, so that most of the time they could look down upon the lapping wavelets of the Aegean.

Then they swung inland for a few minutes. 'We're on the actual isthmus now', said Mr Wharton.

'How wide is it?' asked Martin.

'About four miles at the narrowest place—of course, you didn't come through the Canal with us, did you? Well, you'll see it soon, but you'll have to look quickly as we go over the bridge.'

Road and railway crossed the Canal, fairly close together, at a point about midway between the two seas. Leaning out of the window, Martin and Nicola saw—just for a few seconds—the narrow strip of blue water unbelievably far below them. A small steamer was creeping towards them about half a mile away. Behind her, the clean-cut sides of the Canal stretched, ever-diminishing, into the distance. It was like a drawing-master's example of perspective.

CORINTH said the board sliding past the window as they slowed down into the next station. They looked out on both sides, though Mr Wharton explained that they would not see much. This was not the classical Corinth which once had vied with Athens and Sparta as a great power. Old Corinth lay a little further on where St Paul had once lived for eighteen months and where Diogenes, the philosopher in the tub, had died. Again there would be little to see except the ruins of the citadel above. Present-day Corinth was entirely modern. After being burnt to ashes during the War of Independence, and then suffering two fearful earthquakes in 1858 and 1861, it retained no old buildings whatever.

As the train pulled out, and Nicola commented that they were now well and truly in the Peloponnese, her mother demanded to know the meaning of the term. 'I keep hearing it', she complained 'and I've long given up any hope of being able to spell it, but just what *is* it?'

Mr Wharton explained that it meant 'the island of Pelops'. Pelops was a legendary hero, and of course it wasn't quite an island—it was a big peninsula, joined (as she had just seen) to the

rest of Greece by the Isthmus of Corinth. Another name for it was Morca, which some people derived from the *morea*, or mulberry-trees, which grew there so plentifully. More likely, though, it came from a Slav word, *more*, meaning 'sea'. At one time the region had been overrun by people of Slav race. The Greeks, of course, were not Slavs, like most of their northern neighbours, except in so far as their blood had got mixed by inter-marriage.

'Is that the citadel?' interrupted Nicola excitedly.

'Yes—'

'I say!' gasped Martin.

Acrocorinth—'high Corinth'—rose from the flat ground like some fairy-tale castle. It stood on an almost sheer cliff, nearly two thousand feet above the nearby sea. The summit of the crag was crowned with battlements. 'Crowned' was the exact word, for there seemed no spare space. The fortress sat on the top as a crown rests on a king's head. The crenellations—or the 'up-and-down bits', as Martin called them—increased the resemblance, and so did the heavy keep rising in the centre.

'Mostly Venetian work', said Mr Wharton.

'Oh, I wish we'd been going up there, Daddy!'

'You can go up the Venetian fortress at Nauplia. Very impressive—but not nearly such a sweat to reach the top!'

Soon the hills began to close in again. The line wound in and out, crossing and re-crossing the road. It was a friendly, informal sort of railway, running past cottage-doors and startling sheep and goats, which had been browsing among the grass and wild flowers that grew between the sleepers.

'This is Heracles country', said Mr Wharton, 'or Hercules, if you will use his Roman name! That by-road leads to Nemea. Slaying the Nemean lion was one of his twelve labours.'

'Were there ever lions here?' asked Martin in surprise.

'Oh, yes! There must have been lions in Greece once—but that's going right back, you know, before what we call "classical" times.'

They came through a narrow pass and the train soon afterwards began to slow down. It stopped. 'Here we are!' cried Mr Wharton, handing down their bags and rucksacks. A smiling stationmaster came forward to take their tickets, the diesel train pulled out again,

and at once it was as though they were standing by an ordinary cottage in the open fields.

'Is this Mycenae?' laughed Nicola. 'How funny!'

It *did* seem funny. She could not connect this sleepy railway halt with the 'golden Mycenae' of legend, the proud capital of Atreus and Agamemnon, childhood home of Phigeneia and Orestes, setting of that terrible tragedy she had seen acted in the theatre at Delphi.

The stationmaster asked if they wanted a taxi. It was over three kilometres to the site, he warned them, all uphill. So they decided to save their energy, and soon they were driving up the dusty road towards the grey, rather grim-looking mountains. There was a village called Kharvati, and then suddenly the taxi pulled up in front of the hotel, a surprisingly modern-looking place with a sun-lounge and a restaurant with huge plate-glass windows. Things had changed, said Mr Wharton rather wistfully, since his previous visit many years before.

After lunch, they climbed the last short stretch of road to the site. As they went, he told them how it had been first excavated by Schliemann in the nineteenth century. Until his day, learned men had scoffed at the idea that Homer's 'Mycenae of the wide ways' had really existed. They dismissed it, like Troy itself, as the invention of the poet. Indeed, just because some parts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were too far-fetched to be literally true, they had regarded Homer as a mere spinner of mythical romances. It was the vision of the German business man, Schliemann, together with his life-long determination, that had led first to Troy's being re-discovered and later Mycenae, capital of the Trojans' arch-enemy, Agamemnon 'Lord of men'.

'You may remember', said Mr Wharton, 'we saw some of the things he dug up when we went to the museum in Athens.'

'Of course!' cried Nicola. 'Those golden vases—'

'And the swords', said Martin, 'and the gold masks for the kings' faces when they were buried—'

They pressed forward more eagerly, remembering the wonderful 'finds' they had seen in the Schliemann Collection. Especially as Mr Wharton said that archaeologists were still making important discoveries, eighty years after Schliemann. Several royal graves

had been uncovered within recent times—one, of a young princess, was called the Crystal Grave because it contained so many objects of finely carved rock crystal. One such object was a jug in the shape of a duck, its curved neck and head serving as the handle and its tail as the spout.

It was amazing to think that this high civilization had flourished here between the years 1500 and 1200 B.C.—that it had already been a memory when Homer composed his poems, as remote from him as the Tudors from today. Up here, in this now desolate nook of the barren hills, there had once been a royal city.

'Look', said Mr Wharton, 'these grooves in the stone are the marks of the chariot wheels!'

They had come upon the place quite suddenly at the end, for there were no skyline ruins to be sighted from a distance. They had simply turned a bend in their climb and there, dramatically, rose the famous Lion Gate. Walls of gigantic rock slabs flanked a square entrance. Two upright stones, ten feet high, were covered ('rather like Stonehenge', commented Mrs Wharton) with a lintel fifteen feet long, and above this monolith was an immense triangular block of grey limestone, carved in relief with the figures of two lions. They stood on their hind legs, their forelegs resting on the base of a sacred pillar which rose between them. Although the apex of the triangle was missing, so that the lions had lost their heads, the sculpture was still ten feet high. As the block was two feet thick, and twelve along its base, it was amazing to think of the skill which must have been needed to fix it there over the gateway.

The children's amazement did not diminish as they wandered round the rest of the site. The citadel was spread over a spur of mountainside, commanding the valley, yet itself dwarfed by the peaks which rose behind it. Here were 'shaft graves' and 'beehive tombs', marking different periods in the history of the place. Here could be traced the plan of a royal palace, with its courtyard and antechamber and great hall, such as Homer's heroes might have dwelt in. Museum show-cases might display the wealth and artistic skill of the bygone people who had once lived here, but it needed the ruins themselves to bring home to a modern visitor their engineering ability and their command of man-power. One of the

stone slabs was estimated to weigh more than a hundred tons. Where had the Mycenaeans learnt to handle such blocks? Had it been from the Egyptians?

It was, as Nicola was fond of saying, 'a magic place', and they were all glad that they were staying the night there—even though the neon lights in the restaurant below did a little to banish the atmosphere. But they had only to stroll a few yards outside for the spell to return. Westwards the sun had just dipped behind the mountains into Arcadia. Dusk was creeping over the Argive plain: It was easy to people the shadows with dim figures—Agamemnon in his golden armour, Clytemnestra the brooding murderess, Cassandra the doomed Trojan princess, crying out her unheeded warnings as the chariot halted up there at the gateway, under the sculptured lions.

Yes, Mycenae was a magic—no, a haunted—place.

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A week later, looking back on a crowd of memories, the two children had a friendly argument as to which were the highlights of their Peloponnesian tour. They had gone round in a sweeping, clockwise circle, sometimes in crowded little buses, sometimes in diesel railcars, occasionally in a taxi. . . . Every day had brought its own unforgettable impressions.

There had been Argos, down the valley seawards from Mycenae . . . Argos with its hillside theatre and its brand-new secondary school, of which any town at home would have been proud. . . . Argos, where Nicola bought an immense straw sombrero, with a brim as wide as a cartwheel, to shelter her from the fiery shafts of Apollo. What fun it had been, buying that hat without her father to help with the interpreting! She had tried on one after another in that funny little open-fronted shop, until a crowd of interested passers-by had come edging their way inside with smiles and helpful suggestions, and the distracted proprietor had had to shoo them out like a lot of hens!

Then lovely Nauplia, where they had slept the following night, their bedroom balconies looking down on a landlocked harbour whose clear calm water reflected the mountains opposite as though in a lake! Nauplia with its sapphire sea and honey-gold ramparts, splashed with purple flowers; its promenade with elegant lamp-

posts and seats, fresh-painted in the national colours, blue and white; the tufty palm-trees, the white caiques with their keels of scarlet or blue or orange, brightly reflected in the clear water; the tiny islet of Bourzi with its fort-like buildings, now a luxury hotel with a motor-boat chugging to and fro to ferry its guests; the little streets and squares with their brown or yellow houses, their architecture recalling the Venetian or the Turkish periods of occupation; and, overhanging all, the fantastic fortress of Palamidj, half an hour's climb by a zigzag succession of dizzy paths and stairways. Lovely Nauplia—no wonder that it had once been considered as a possible capital of Greece, after the War of Independence.

Two nights at Nauplia they had had, so that they could make the trip to Epidaurus. 'Is there anything there but just another old theatre?' Martin had asked in an unguarded moment. He had admitted later that the trip had been worth while. The theatre was the best they had seen—indeed, said Mr Wharton, it was the best-preserved Greek theatre in existence. Nor was it the only thing to see, for there were the ruins of a great shrine to Asclepius, god of healing. Pilgrims had once flocked here in their thousands, to seek a cure. Epidaurus had been Lourdes, Bath, and Stratford-on-Avon, all in one. And what a setting, under the mountain, looking back across the sea to Aegina and Athens!

Nothing much at Sparta. But then, hadn't the Spartans always boasted that the walls of their state were its warriors? The scenery made up for the dullness of the modern town—there was the smiling vale of the Eurotas, meandering southwards to the sea through a land pricked with slender poplars or bushy with eucalyptus-trees and oleanders, and westwards there was the long shaggy ridge of Taygetus, one of the most beautiful of all Greek mountains, once the harsh testing-ground of the tough Spartan youth.

'And if I hadn't stood out for going to Sparta', Nicola recalled, 'we'd never have seen Mistra.'

True, there had been Mistra, a strange sleeping-princess of a town. It had been founded as a stronghold, only four miles from Sparta, by the Crusader-adventurer, Villehardouin. Afterwards it had become an important Byzantine centre, capital of the

Peloponnese and had been enriched therefore with a great cluster of churches and monasteries, a brilliant late flowering of Byzantine art and civilization—much of it still wonderfully preserved, just because Mistra was a back-water which had missed so many of the wars and revolutions afflicting other cities in the centuries afterwards. Here still, let into the floor of the fourteenth-century cathedral, was the two-headed imperial eagle, marking the spot where Constantine Palacologus, last Emperor of Byzantium, had been crowned. Five years later he had died, at the head of his guards, when the Turks broke into Byzantium and overthrew the empire which had lasted since the Caesars.

Mistra, with its still-bright wall-paintings, its empty echoing churches, its narrow cobbled streets silent except for the rare footfall of a nun—a few nuns were now almost the only inhabitants—yes, Mistra had been another haunted place. . . .

After that, they had struck across to the west coast, and then it had been a coastal journey all the way back to Athens, except when they had turned inland for a day to see the original site of the Olympic Games.

‘And I always used to think they were something to do with Mount Olympus’, Mrs Wharton confessed.

Not only was Olympia at the opposite end of Greece, but its landscape was utterly different. It lay in a flat, well-wooded, luxuriant plain. Nearby flowed the River Alpheus, meandering through clean shingle and silvery fine sand, with poplars and cypresses throwing thin bands of shadow across its bright water, and everywhere, of course, the gnarled trunks and pale grey foliage of the olives. The foundations lay amid the tall grass, pleasantly shaded by the pine-trees which had sprung up among them. Only a few pillars still stood upright, white and glistening where they caught the sun. Everything else was flat. There were the bases where countless statues had stood, but all were gone now, though some precious remains were gathered in the nearby museum, such as the broken but beautiful ‘Hermes’ of Praxiteles, showing the messenger-god with Dionysus, as a baby, in his arms, stretching up to reach a bunch of grapes.

As at Delphi, the ruins were spread over a wide area, but here it was level, filling the broad space between the river bank and

the wooded slopes of a little cone-shaped hill. There was not only a great stadium—archaeologists had marked out the sites of a gymnasium, a wrestling school, the temple of Zeus, and a number of other buildings, including Roman baths and other additions made in the period of the Empire. The Olympic Games had continued until A.D. 394—and they had probably been started in the ninth century B.C. Certainly they had been carried on, every fourth year in unbroken sequence, for more than a thousand years. Like Delphi, Olympia had served as a meeting-place for all Greeks, drawn from the farthest ends of the Mediterranean.

As their way lay through Patras, Nicola insisted that they should go and call on Miss Kallinikos, as they had been invited to. The schools were still closed, so she would not yet have gone back to Ithaca. They sent off a telegram, just to warn her that they were in the neighbourhood, and much to their surprise they found her waiting on the railway-station.

'I guessed', she laughed. 'There are not so many trains on this line!'

It made all the difference, knowing someone who lived in the town. For, as Miss Kallinikos had warned them, there was not much for the ordinary tourist in Patras. But, with her to show them round and take them home to an evening meal with her family, they had a delightful day. She knew all the best shops, many of which were in cool arcades, shaded by the overhanging upper storeys. And in the evening she took them up to the town's one show-place, the mediaeval castle, built by the Villehardouins and enlarged by the Venetians. It stood on a steep hill above the town. A long, long flight of steps went straight down in front of the fortress, and then, from the foot of these, the main thoroughfare ran through the town until it reached the waterfront. Beyond gleamed the waters of the Ionian Sea, here narrowing to the entrance of the Corinthian Gulf. Beyond them, in turn, rose the mountains of Western Greece and Cephalonia and Ithaca itself, purple and black under the fiery gold of the sunset sky.

'Oh, it's beautiful!' cried Nicola.

Miss Kallinikos looked pleased. 'Patras is famous for its sunsets', she said with pride.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE ISLES OF GREECE

‘“*The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!*”’ Nicola chanted exultantly, dancing round Anna in the kitchen. And the maid smiled at her excitement, though she looked a little sad, herself, because the Whartons were off again, and very soon they would be off for the last time.

They could just fit in this trip to some of the islands before they must start back for England. Martin was having this final week with them. Then it was all fixed for him to move over to the Mavraki twins for a little while, and from the beginning of October his father had the promise of a furnished flat, with a housekeeper to run it. In any case, there was much less need for anyone to worry over Martin nowadays. He had grown up in recent months and come to terms with life. He was ready to stand on his own feet. When he had made the most of another year at school he was going into the Merchant Navy. His mind was quite clear about that. He was adrift no longer.

For some days the household had hotly discussed which islands they should visit. There were, as the map revealed, a great number. Large and small (and even smaller), the isles of Greece were scattered over the Aegean as though from some gigantic pepper-pot. In the north were the Sporades, including Scyros, where the English poet, Rupert Brooke, was buried. Further south were the Cyclades, with Apollo’s sacred island of Delos and many others. Eastwards, fringing the Turkish coast, were famous islands such as Chios and Samos and Lesbos, home of the poetess Sappho. Southwards of them, again, were Rhodes and the smaller Dodecanese, the ‘twelve islands’ (as the name meant in Greek) surrendered by Italy after the second world war. Furthest south of all was the long, important island of Crete, which was a ‘must’ in any route they planned.

After considering several attractive programmes, they booked passages on the m/v *Delfini* of the Kavounides Shipping Company, which left Piraeus every Monday and returned towards the end of

the week, after touching at half a dozen islands. This suited them very well.

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Crete was the first island visited. It was a very big one, one of the largest in the Mediterranean, almost on a par with Sicily or Sardinia, though much narrower. At one point it was less than eight miles wide and it was nowhere more than thirty-five, though from west to east it stretched for a hundred and sixty. Its skyline was as jagged as a saw with mountain-peaks—the White Mountains and, highest of all, Mount Ida, the legendary birthplace of Zeus, king of the Olympian gods.

Up in those wild hills, said Mr Wharton, country-life went on very much as it had done for centuries. Blood-feuds still separated families and even whole villages. It was still not unknown for some modern Cretan Romeo to muster his armed friends and kidnap his chosen Juliet. There might be neon lights and American films down in Herakleion or the other towns, Canea or Retimo, but up among the limestone crags and caves and the thorny scrub you would still meet picturesque white-cloaked shepherds in turbans, hung about with cartridge-belts and carrying rifles and (as the Cretan phrase went) 'bristling like lobsters' with silver-mounted daggers and pistols.

Mr Wharton knew what he was talking about. Martin, who had always looked upon him as a mild, scholarly person was astounded to learn that, during the war against Hitler, Nicola's father had himself known these very hills as an ally of the local guerrillas. He sat on the deck of the *Delfini* open-mouthed as the memories began to stir and Mr Wharton, quietly and slowly with his West Country deliberation, began to tell of the Crete he had known in the old days.

After Crete had been overwhelmed by Nazi parachutists, the islanders had carried on a fearless underground resistance throughout the war. British officers had come to join them. Sometimes they had been dropped by parachute themselves, sometimes they had been landed from submarines. Quite a number of these British officers had been university dons like Mr Wharton himself, whose previous knowledge of Greece was valuable. Later, reading some of the exciting war-books about those days, Martin

was to learn what Mr Wharton was too modest to mention himself—that those university dons had shown themselves, when put to the test, as heroic and resourceful and tough as any so-called ‘men of action’.

Martin could have listened for ever to these wartime experiences but Mr Wharton perversely changed the subject and insisted on talking about the Crete of three or four thousand years ago, the centre of the ‘Minoan’ civilization which had been older even than Mycenae. They all went ashore at Herakleion (which was sometimes called Candia) and, as there was nothing much to see in the port itself (it had been badly bombed, and about the only historical remains were the Venetian ramparts and fountain), they drove straight out to the excavations at Cnossus, not far away.

Even Mrs Wharton admitted that she had heard of Theseus and Ariadne, but as she was a little hazy about the legend Nicola readily refreshed her memory.

King Minos had lived at Cnossus when it was the capital of a mighty empire, and even places like Athens had paid tribute to him. He had built himself a wonderful palace, including a maze—his palace was called the Labyrinth, and that was how the longer word had come to mean any kind of maze. In the heart of the maze lived a monster, the Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, which had to be fed on human flesh. Athens had to send as tribute a party of chosen youths and girls, who were thrust into the maze to wander there until, one by one, they fell victims to the monster. At last, the young Athenian hero Theseus resolved to end the business. He volunteered for the party of victims. When he arrived, he made such a good impression on the King’s daughter, Ariadne, that she supplied him with a ball of thread and a sword, so that he was able to kill the Minotaur, find his way out of the maze by tracing back the thread he had unwound, and then run off with the princess. Unfortunately—and most unromantically—they did *not* live happily ever after.

Mr Wharton said that this was another excellent example of an apparent fairy-tale hiding a great deal of sober historical fact.

There was no doubt that Crete, lying half-way between Egypt and mainland Greece, had been the earliest home of Greek

civilization. A kind of ceremonial, bloodless bull-fighting had been practised—articles dug up showed athletic young Cretans seizing bulls by their horns and vaulting over their backs. As for the maze—well, they could see for themselves, now that they were actually standing on the site of that vast rambling palace with its innumerable rooms and courts and staircases, how later generations of men had exaggerated it into a deliberately-planned ‘labyrinth’. Especially as the later Greeks, however important they were, had lived in quite simple houses.

It was an Englishman, Sir Arthur Evans, who had discovered Cnossus. The site measured about a hundred and fifty yards square. The Whartons and Martin went in by the northern, seaward entrance, where there had once been a roofed portico, now referred to as ‘the Hall of the Eleven Pillars’. From this hall a narrow corridor, flanked by massive walls, led into a great paved court, and round this the main apartments of the palace had been ranged.

It was still possible to see the square, sunken tanks where oil had been stored. More oil had been kept in immense earthenware jars, taller even than Mr Wharton—they still stood there, with the moulded rope-like decoration on their sides which the potters had shaped three or four thousand years ago. Dozens of terra-cotta tablets had been found, bearing the stewards’ lists and accounts in the Cretan script which learned men were gradually managing to decipher. The palace had even had a modern sanitary system, the drains being laid in the shape of a huge figure 9, leading down to a stream, and there were beautifully tapered terra-cotta pipes to take away the rainwater from the roofs and courtyard. And there were other things to see, more romantic than these domestic details—such as the chiselled, stone throne of the king, with its scalloped leaf-shaped back, which still stood against the wall, with the benches for his councillors on either side and the mural paintings (restored by a modern artist) which showed a strange creature, a sacred gryphon, lying beside the papyrus-reeds of the Nile. And there were the splendid staircases and the vast open dance-floor, of which Homer had recorded: ‘*Daedalus once made a dancing-floor in broad Cnossus for fair-haired Ariadne.*’

‘I think archaeology is jolly fascinating’, Martin admitted. ‘It’s

like detective-work really, isn't it—putting clues together and finding things?

'It is rather', agreed Mr Wharton.

'And they still seem to be finding fresh stuff—that's what is so queer, after all these years.'

'Oh, yes, as you've seen—at Mycenae, even in Athens itself, there's lots of work to be done yet, lots of possibilities. And now there's all this under-water archaeology starting too.'

'You mean frogmen? Sunken galleys and that sort of thing?'

'Yes, aqualung diving. I heard of one party that found the wrecks of more than twenty Greek and Roman galleys—all in one month. But it isn't only lost ships and cargoes they go after. You see, the level of the Aegean has risen quite a few feet since those days. Buildings which used to be on the waterfront may now be lying two or three fathoms under the sea, covered with mud or seaweed.'

'It would be jolly exciting, I should think, doing some of that', said Martin wistfully.

\* \* \*

Their next island was Thera, otherwise known as Santorin.

This was a fantastic place, created by a volcano under the sea. It was in the shape of a rugged horseshoe, the cliffs rising almost sheer on the inner coastline, and then sloping more gently away to the outward shores. Smaller islands were strung across the open end of the horseshoe, and it was possible to understand how, before the Mycenaean Age, there had been just one round island with a hollow in the centre, the summit of a volcano rising above the surface of the sea. Then there had been some terrible eruption, one side of the crater had split, and the waves had rushed into the middle. There were three still smaller islands now in the centre of this strange haven—they were called the 'Burnt Islands' and had been thrown up by later eruptions. In 1650, said the guide-book, another island had appeared, only to vanish three months later.

'I say', cried Martin, 'it says here that the volcano is *still* active!'

'What a thrill if something happened while we were here!' said Nicola. But her tone sounded a trifle forced, and she did not look entirely sorry when the *Delfini* resumed her voyage.

Rhodes was the next port of call, once the stronghold of the

Knights Hospitallers in their struggle against Saracens and Turks. As they explored the inner walled city of mediaeval times, and walked up the famous Street of the Knights with its massive Gothic buildings, almost like Oxford colleges, it was easy to fancy themselves back in the age of chivalry. The knights of the various countries had been grouped in 'languages', and the knights of each language had lived together in a hall or 'inn'. Climbing the street, Mr Wharton pointed out the knights' hospital, now a museum, with its cloistered quadrangle; the Spanish Inn (now the British consulate) with its massive rounded door; the Italian Inn with its double eagle; the French Inn, with its fine square windows and battlements and the carved coat-of-arms and cardinal's hat of the Grand Master, Pierre d'Aubusson, who had withstood the Turkish siege in 1480; then, as they passed under an archway spanning the street, the Provençal Inn and the rest of the inns, ending in the Palace of the Grand Master (a modern restoration of ) at the top.

They all enjoyed their brief visit to Rhodes and would gladly have stayed longer. It was such a sunny, colourful island, well-named 'the Island of Roses' and 'the Bride of the Sun'. The harbour was thronged with shipping of all sizes, and the town was a picturesque mixture of architectural styles—modern Italian houses mingled with Byzantine churches, Crusaders' ramparts and Turkish mosques. And, thrusting up amid the domes and minarets and battlements, were plenty of trees. The outer ditch of the city was a gay riot of white and pink oleanders, mingled with the heavier purple flowers of the bougainvillea and the vivid red of hibiscus.

From the heights of Rhodes they could see the distant coast of Turkey. They had reached the eastern limit of the Greek islands, which stretched like stepping-stones from Europe to Asia. The *Delfini* swung round and headed homewards for Piræus.

On the way, they stopped at Paros, a beautiful island, famous for its marble. Parian marble was whiter and more dazzling than that cut from the quarries on Pentelicus, near Athens.

They saw fine Parian marble when they landed on Delos and saw the terrace of the five lions, carved from it, guarding the one-time sanctuary of Apollo. They were perhaps the most striking

relics among all the ruins of that sacred island, on which (in ancient times) no baby had been born and no man had been allowed to die. Birth and death alike would have made the Sun God's island unclean.

Even today there did not seem to be much of a permanent population. Delos was a sort of annexe to Myconos, nearby—it was mostly peasants from Myconos who came over to farm the land, for what it was worth.

'A chancy business', one of the ship's officers told the Whartons. 'When the weather is bad, they cannot get home! You are wise to come to Delos on a cruise, like ours, for there is no ordinary service. Otherwise, you must first land at Myconos, and then come across from there—and always there is the danger you may be caught in a sudden change of weather and be stuck on Delos for a day or two!'

Even Myconos had a very poor harbour. Vessels had to anchor at the entrance, where they were met by rowboats. Luckily it was a calm day for the Whartons' visit, but after the experience of dropping down into a gently bobbing rowboat, in what felt like mid-ocean, Mrs Wharton declared firmly that she was glad they had not planned their whole tour of the islands the rough way. Nicola and Martin thought it was great fun.

In spite of the awkward landing facilities Myconos was a popular holiday-resort with Athenians, and it was quite easy to see why. The little town, with its clean white-washed houses and green shutters and coral-pink church-roofs and domes, was as pretty as a picture. Narrow streets wound hither and thither, shaded by pepper-trees and acacias and eucalyptus. Outside staircases mounted invitingly to upper balconies. Most distinctive of all the features on the island were the dazzling white windmills, their sweeping sails joined round the perimeter so that, instead of resembling crosses like the windmill sails the children were used to, they looked more like giant wheels.

This was the last port of call. Tomorrow, just after breakfast, they would dock at Piraeus. And, even though there would be a few more days of clearing up in Athens, with some farewell parties, there was already, for Nicola and her parents, a 'last night' feeling in the air. Martin felt it too, though he was staying in Greece.

This, really, was the end of the journey he had shared with them.

'Of course, I'm longing to see everybody at home', babbled the irrepressible Nicola. 'All the same, I feel terribly sad when I realize I'm leaving all this behind me.'

'You never leave Greece behind you', her father corrected her gently. 'If you've ever known Greece once—even if you've never managed to set foot in the country, if you've only known it through loving its history and art and literature—you never leave Greece behind. It's something that's with you, always.'

The *Delfini* crept forward, barely ruffling the clear waters of the Aegean. In front, fresh islets lifted their jagged silhouettes against the bronze shield of the western sky. It was the same horizon Odysseus must have seen so many evenings as he struggled home from Troy—the same the Argonauts must have watched as they sailed homeward with the Golden Fleece—the same that Ariadne must have gazed at through her tears when she found herself deserted on Naxos.

In all those islands now, and all over the mainland beyond, the lights would soon be twinkling out in cottage and café, the stoves would be glowing red and the olive-oil smoking fragrantly in the polished pans, the girls would be laughing at the fountain, the boys would be coming up from the fishing-boats and down from the olive-yards and the high pastures, and soon the coarse resinated wine would be flowing redly into the glasses and the strains of simple home-made music would be stealing out across the twilit village-square.

Softly, under his breath, Mr Wharton was quoting from Francis Ledwidge:

*'The sheep are coming home in Greece,  
Hark the bells on every hill!'*

The ship crept forward between the islands, and night came down upon the wine-dark sea.



# INDEX AND PRONUNCIATIONS

*It is not always possible to write the equivalent of the exact sounds of words. You should regard the pronunciations given here as a guide which will enable you to get reasonably close to those generally considered to be correct.*

a as in bat	ă as in batc	â as in calm	ä as in aunt (pronounced very shortly)
e as in bet	ē as in beat	ê as in her	
i as in bit	ī as in bite	o as in cot	ō as in coat
oo as in soot	ōō as in coo	g as in gold	g̃ as in the Scotch loch
u as in but	aw as in fawn		
th as in thing	dh, th as in the	in, the French nasalized n	

If one syllable is to be stressed more than another it is followed by ' (thus ē-jē'an).

ACADEMY, 90  
 Acropolis, 57, 74-81, 100, 107  
 Acrocorinth, 140  
 Actium, 38, 52  
 Adam, Sir Frederick (1781-1853), 20  
 Adriatic Sea, 12  
 Aegean (ē-jē'an) Sea, 35, 53, 130, 139, 147-54  
 Aegina (ē-jī'na), 35, 54  
 Aenos (e'nos), Mt, 45  
 Aeschylus (ē'skil-us) (525-456 B.C.), 56, 111, 124  
 Agamemnon (ag-a-mem'non), 124, 126, 141-3  
 Agora (ag'or-a), 113  
 Airways, 32-6, 131  
 Alcinous (al-kin'o-us), 13, 39  
 Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), 18, 75, 135  
 Alphabet, 11, 16, 43  
 Alpheus (al-fe'us), 145  
 Anavryton School, 103  
 Angelica, s.s., 11-25, 37-59  
 Anglo-American School, 103  
 Antony, Mark (83-30 B.C.), 38, 52  
 Aphrodite (a'fro-dī'tē), 76  
 Apollo (a-pol'eō), 93-4, 118, 121, 129, 147, 152  
 Arachova (a-rā'gō-vā), 121, 125  
 Arcadia, 126, 143

Archaeology, 80, 113, 141, 146, 150-1  
 Architecture, 76, 88-9, 91, 152  
 Arcopagus (a-ri-op'a-gus), 72, 78, 112  
 Argonauts, 154  
 Argos, 126, 138, 143  
 Ariadne (a-ri-ad'nē), 149, 150, 154  
 Aristophanes (a-ri-stof'an-ēz) (?450-385 B.C.), 81, 111  
 Aristotle (a'ri-stot-el) (384-322 B.C.), 44, 81  
 Arnold, Matthew (1822-88), 128  
 Art, 79, 92, 97, 145  
 Arta, Gulf of, 38  
 Artemis (ār'teni-is), 76  
 Asclepius (a-skīē'pi-us), 144  
 Asia Minor, 34, 40, 74-5, 135  
 Athene (a-thē'ne), 57, 76, 77, 80  
 Athens, 35, 48, 53, 57-117, 138  
 Athens College, 103  
 Atreus (ā'trōōs), 141  
 Attica, 119

BOFOTIA (bi-ō'sha), 119  
 Brooke, Rupert (1887-1915), 147  
 Burnt Islands, 151  
 Byron, Lord (1788-1824), 27, 46-7, 55

Byzantium (bi-zan'li-um), 18, 75,  
78-9, 87-9, 92, 97, 144-5

CANDIA, 149

Canea (ka-nē'a), 148

Caiques (ka'eks'), 31, 38, 44, 144

Canoni (ka-nō'ni), 21-2, 31, 34

Carpet-making, 34

Caryatids (kar'i-a-tids), 77, 108

Cassandra (kas-san'dia), 124, 143

Castalian Spring (ka-stā'li-an), 124

Cathedrals, 87, 94, 95, 99, 145

Cephalonia (sef-a-lō'ni-a), 42, 45, 146

Cephalus (sef-ē'sus), 129

Cervantes (ser-van'tēz) (1547-1616),  
46

Chesterton, G. K. (1874-1936), 46

Chios (ki'os), 147

Churches, 15, 79, 88, 91, 145

Cithaeron (si-thēr'on), Mt, 57, 119

Civil War, 40

Cleopatra (69-30 B.C.), 38, 52

Climate, 21, 24, 91

Clytemnestra (kli-tem-nes'tra), 143

Cnossus (k-nos'sus), 149

Constantine Palaeologus (pal-e-ol'o-  
gus) (d. 1453), 145

Constantinople (kon-stan-tin-ō'pl),  
79

Copais (ko-pā'is), Lake, 119

Corcyra (kor-sir'a), 18

Corfu (kor-fōō), 12-13, 18-34, 85

Corinth, 90, 138-9

Corinth Canal, 50-3, 122, 139

Corinth, Gulf of, 44-5, 124, 126, 146

Costume, 114-16

Cows, 24

Crete (krēt), 57, 147-50

Cricket, 19, 27

Croesus (krē'sus) (6th cent. B.C.), 122

Crusades, 44, 144

Currants, 49, 133

Cyclades (sik'lad-ēz), 147

DAEDALUS (dē'dal-us), 150

Daoukli (da-ōōk'li), Lake, 132

Daphne, 93

Daphni, 89-93

*Delfini*, m/v, 147

Delos (dē'los), 55, 147, 152-3

Delphi (del'fi), 90, 110, 118, 121-4

Demosthenes (de-mo's then-ēz) (384-  
322 B.C.), 113

Diogenes (di-o'jen-ēz) (412-323 B.C.),  
139

Dionysus (dī-on-i'sus), 110, 112, 129,  
145

Dodecanese Islands, (dō-dek'an-ēz),  
47

Drama, 111, 118, 124, 144

EARTHQUAKES, 40-2, 139

Easter, 66, 68, 82-100

Edinburgh, Duke of (b. 1921), 20,  
103

Elateia (el-a-tē'a), 89

Eleusis (el-ōō'sis), 89-90, 139

Elgin (el'jin), Lord (1766-1841), 77

Elliniko (el-lēn'ik-ō), 103

Emigration, 34

Epidaurus (ep-i-daw'rus), 144

Epirus (ep-i'rus), 13, 32, 37-8, 129

Epitaphios (ep-i-taf'i-ōs), 86, 95-8

Erechtheum (e-rek-thē'um), 77, 108

Erechtheus (e-rek'thōōs), 77

Euboea (yōō-bē'a), 36, 115, 129

Euripides (yōō-rip'i-dēz) (480-406  
B.C.), 44, 56, 81, 111

Eurotas (yōō-rō'tas), 144

Evans, Sir Arthur (1851-1941), 150

Evzones, 32, 115

Exports, 133

FARMING, 24, 43, 116, 119, 120, 132-3

Fishing, 15, 31, 36

Flag, Greek, 11, 36

Franks, 44

*Fustanella* (fus-tan-el'la), 115

GLADSTONE, W. F. (1809-1898), 43

Goats, 24, 27, 120

HADRIAN (hā'dri-an) (A.D. 76-138),  
110-11

Helicon (he'li-kon), Mt, 120-1

Hellenikon (he-lēn'i-kon) Airport, 75

Hephaestus (he-fēst'us), 113

Hera (hēr'a), 134

Heracles (hēr'a-klēz), 140

Herakleion (hēr-ak'li-on), 148

Herodes (he-rō'dēz) Atticus, 110

Higoumenitsa (ig-ōō'men-it'sa), 31

Homer, 12, 23, 37-8, 40, 54, 141, 150

Houses, 19, 41, 62, 61, 90, 116-17  
Hymettus (hî-nê'ttus), Mt, 57

ICONS (î'kons), 79, 84, 96, 117  
Ida, Mt, 148

*Iliad* (îl'i-ad), 141

Independence, Greek War of, 19,  
20, 45-6, 68, 139

Industry, 90, 133

Ionian Islands, 18, 20, 24, 44, 90

Ionian Sea, 12, 35, 146

Iphigeneia (î'fi-jen-î'a), 141

Islands, 35, 38, 55, 147-54

Itea (it-ê'a), 122

Ithaca (ith'ak-a), 17, 39, 40, 146

JOHN, DON, OF AUSTRIA (1545-1578),  
46

KALAMBAKA (kal-am-bâ'ka), 32

Kharvati (kâr-vâ'ti), 141

Kings of Greece, 20, 32, 85

Kirphis (kir'fis), Mt, 124

Knights Hospitallers, 152

Koraës, A. (1748-1833), 44

*Koulourakia* (kôö-lôö-râ'ki-a), 82-3

LAMIA (lâ'mi-a), 132

Language, 43-5

Larissa (la-ris'sa), 134

Ledwidge, F. (1891-1917), 154

Lepanto (le-pan'tô), 46

Lesbos, 147

Levkas, 38

Livadia (liv-â'di-a), 120

Lycabettus (lik-a-bet'us), Mt, 70, 97

Lysicrates (li-sik'ra-têz) (4th cent.  
B.C.), 114

MACEDONIA, 132

Mackail, J. W., 39

Marathon, 65, 130

Marriage, 49, 69

Megara (meg'ar-a), 139

Meteora (met-e-aw'ra), 134

Minerals, 133

Minotaur (mîn'o-taw'r), 113, 149

Minos (mîn'os), King, 149

Missolonghi (mis-o-long'gi), 46-7

Mistra (mê'stra), 144

Monasteries, 91, 134, 145

Money, 63-4

Mosaics, 91-3

Museums, 21, 114, 124, 141, 145

Mycenae (mî-sên'i), 138, 141-3

Myconos (mî'kon'ps), 153

NAUPLIA (naw'pli-a), 141, 143-4

Nausicaa (naw-sêk'â), 12, 14, 17,  
22-3

Naxos, 154

Nemea (ne-mê'a), 140

Neptune, 23

Nero (nêr'ô) (A.D. 37-68), 52

OCTAVIUS CAESAR (63 B.C.-A.D. 14),  
38, 52

Octopus 106

Odeon (ô'di-on), 110

Odysseus (o-dis'yôôs), 12, 14, 17,  
21-2, 28, 39, 154

*Odyssey* (o'dis-i), 12, 23, 31, 38, 141

Olives, 14, 23-4, 41, 77, 133

Olympia, 138, 145-6

Olympic Games, 138, 145-6

Olympus, Mt, 77, 129, 134

Oracle, 122

Orestes (o-rest'êz), 141

Ossa, Mt, 134

Otranto, Strait of, 12

*Ouzo* (ôö'zo), 99

PALACE, ROYAL, 32, 72

Palamidi (pal-a-mê'di), Fort, 144

Pantocrator (pan-to'krat-or), Mt, 14

Parliament, 72

Parnes (pâr'nêz), Mt, 57

Parnassus (pâr-nas'us), Mt, 118, 121,  
125-9

Paros, 150

Parthenon, 57, 62, 76-7, 108

Patras (pa-tras'), 40, 47-9, 146

Pediment, 76

Pelion (pêl'i-on), Mt, 134

Peloponnese (pel-on-on-ês'), 45, 52,  
126, 139-46

Pelops, 139

Penelope (pe-nel'o-pi), 39

Peneus (pe-nê'us), 135

Pentelicon (pen-tel'i-kon), Mt, 57

Pente Nisia (pen'ti nê'si-a), 54

Pericles (per'i-clêz) (490-429 B.C.),  
81, 113

Persians, 54, 56, 78

Phaeacians (fē-ā'shuñz), 12, 29 f.  
 Pheariades (fē-dri'ad-ēz), 122  
 Phidia (fī'di-as) (5th cent. B.C.), 81  
 Phocis (fō'kis), 124  
 Phoebus (fē'bus), 55  
 Phorcys (faw'ris), 40  
 Pierce College, 103  
 Pindar (522-443 B.C.), 44  
 Pindus Mts, 32, 132  
 Piraeus (pī-rē'us), 36, 48, 57-8  
 Plaka (plā'ka), 74  
 Plato (plā'tō) (429-347 B.C.), 44, 81, 90, 112  
 Pleistos (plī'stus), 122, 124  
 Pontionisi (pon-ti-kō-nē'si), 22  
 Population, 32, 48  
 Poseidon (po-sī'dun), 23, 77, 130  
 Praxiteles (prak-sit'el-ēz) (4th cent. B.C.), 145  
 Priests, 27, 68-9, 79, 84, 97  
 Propylaea (prop-i-lē'a), 80  
 Psychico (sī'kik-ō), 103  
 Pytheas (pī'thi-as) (4th cent. B.C.), 75

QUENNELL, M. & C. H. B., 95

RAILWAYS, 132, 139-41  
 Refugees, 33, 74-5, 136  
 Retimo (re'tē-mō), 148  
 Religion, 27, 68, 78-9, 84, 90, 112, 122  
 Restaurants, 68-9, 104-7  
 Retina (ret-sē'nā), 36, 106  
 Rhodes, 147, 151-2  
 Roads, 20, 32, 119, 138  
 Roman Empire, 52, 78, 110-11, 146

SACRED WAY, 90, 119  
 St Paul, 72, 78, 112, 135, 139  
 Salamis (sal'a-mis), 35, 54, 62, 130  
 Salonika (sa-lon'ik-a), 48, 130, 135-6  
 Sami (sā'mi), 45  
 Samos (sā'mos), 147  
 San Pantaleone (pan-ta-li-ō'ni), 23, 29  
 Santoin, 151  
 Sappho (saf'fō) (?600 B.C.), 44, 55, 147  
 Saracens, 152  
 Schliemann (shlē'man), H. (1822-1890), 141  
 Schools, 42, 103, 143

Scyros (skīr'os), 147  
 Sheep, 24, 98, 120  
 Shepherds, 12  
 Shipping, 36, 49, 58, 134  
 Shops, 25, 66  
 Socrates (sok'ra-tēz) (470-399 B.C.), 81, 112  
 Solomos, D. (1798-1857), 44  
 Sophocles (sof'o-klēz) (495-406 B.C.), 56, 111  
 Sparta, 54, 126, 138, 144  
 Sporades (spaw'ra-dēz), 147  
 Statues, 80, 87, 124, 145  
 Storks, 121  
 Sunium (sōō'ni-um), Cape, 81, 130

*Tavernas* (ta-vēr'nas), 104-7  
 Taygetus (ta-ij'et-us), Mt, 144  
 Tempe (tem'pi). Vale of, 134  
 Thebes (thēbz), 119  
 Thera (thēr'a), 151  
 Thermopylae (ther-mop'i-lē), 31, 54, 129, 132  
 Theseus (thē'syōōs), 111, 113, 149  
 Thessaly, 132, 134  
 Thrace, 129  
 Tobacco, 133  
 Troy, 124, 141  
 Turks, 19, 20, 33, 44, 46, 74, 77-80, 135

VATHY (va'thi), 40  
 Venetians, 18-20, 23, 28, 77, 85, 140  
 Villehardouin (vēl-ār'dōō-in) (1160-1213), 144, 146  
 Vlacherna (vla-chēr'na), 22  
 Volo (vōlō), 134

WATER, 20, 65, 67, 117  
 White Mts, 148  
 Wine, 36, 106  
 Wrangler, H.M.S., 41

XENOPHON (zen'o-fon) (b. 430 B.C.), 81  
 Xerxes (zerk'sēz) (d. 465 B.C.), 54, 132

YANNINA (yan-ē'na), 31

ZANTE (zan'ti), 42, 44  
 Zeus (zyōōs), 134, 146, 148

## GLOSSARY

**Anastasis** (a-nā'sta-sis), Resurrection  
**avgolemono** (av-yō-lem'o-nō), a sauce with lemon juice  
**caïque** (ka-čk), small sailing boat  
**Christos anesti!** (kris'tos a-nes'tē), Christ is risen!  
**dolmades** (dol-má'dhēs), mincemeat balls  
**fustanella** (fus-tan-el'la), kilt  
**kalamarakia** (ka-la-ma-rá'kē-ā), squids, small octopuses  
**Kala Paskha!** (ka'lá pá'skā), Happy Easter!  
**kaly-malra** (ka-lē-mū'rā), good-day  
**keftedes** (kef-tē'dhes), rissoles  
**kokoretsi** (ko-ko-ret'-sē), lamb's entrails grilled  
**kyria** (ke-rē'ā), madam  
**pastiṣio makaronia** (pas-tēt'sē-ō ma-ka-rō'nē-ā), minced meat and macaroni pie  
**ouzo** (ōō'zo), a strong alcoholic drink  
**pilati** (pi-lá'fē), rice  
**portokali** (por-tō-ká'lē), orange  
**retsina** (ret-sē'nū), resin-flavoured wine  
**saloni** (sa-lō'nē), saloon  
**souvlakia** (sōō-vlá'kē-ā), grilled lamb on skewers  
**taverna** (ta-vēr'na), a type of restaurant